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# **STRANGE CRIMES**



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PREFECTURE DE POLICE

ARCHIVES



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- 2 JULES LEBEL, ALIAS "THE GHOUL"
3. JULES LEBEL'S EFFEMINATE EAR

*Frontispiece (see p. 119)*

# STRANGE CRIMES

Culled from the archives of the Paris Sûreté.

by  
H. ASHTON-WOLFE

*With 42 Illustrations from Photographs*

SECOND IMPRESSION



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In MEMORY of my old master the great  
ALPHONSE BERTILLON  
who lives again in these records.

To  
MAGGIE, FREDa, and my MOTHER

I dedicate these stories.

H. ASHTON-WOLFE

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## FOREWORD

IT has often been debated whether the methods of those who battle unceasingly with the scheming, ruthless denizens of the underworld should remain cloaked in mystery, or whether some of the many interesting cases, depicting as they do the daily struggle for life, subtle or uncouth, might not be related.

Those who favour secrecy allege that to reveal the methods of the modern detective is to rob him of half his strength and power and, by instructing the evildoer, make his task more arduous. Others again believe that if the honest citizen knew more of what materially helps the police in an investigation he would less often unwittingly destroy valuable clues. That belief has found favour to-day even in the eyes of such men as Dr. Locard of the Lyons police and M. Chiappe, the Prefect of Paris police himself. Indeed, the real criminal needs no instruction, he knows all about fingerprints—not because writers have made this potent agent public, but because frequent, albeit involuntary, periods of rest behind prison walls have taught him all there is to be known about stains, marks, and fingerprints. He knows well that the dust in the lining of his clothes, the dirt under his fingernails, and in fact every part and parcel of his person have become to the scientific detective of to-day an open, legible page, revealing his habits, his occupation, and his diurnal or nocturnal activities. He still cherishes the queer conceit, however, that the detective is a fool, who, without the host of busybodies and treacherous informers, would be helpless, and that with a little care and cunning he can still beat him. To this type of man a peep behind the scenes must come as a shock, and, if his nerves or his stupidity are not unshakable, may act as a deterrent. Moreover, no amount of publicity given to police methods will ever teach him to avoid leaving those traces which must prove his undoing. Take the case of fingerprints. In the seclusion of his own room, whilst mapping out his plan of campaign, the malefactor may decide that he will wear gloves and take good care not to touch any

polished surface. How much of this will he remember on the scene of action, when, surrounded by unfamiliar objects, his heart pounding fiercely, his nerves taut, listening with straining ears to every ominous sound from above, below, and without, he creeps from door to door, *feeling his way*? Swift movements are urgent; to collect his loot and be gone, hammers at his subconscious mind. A door creaks and he swings round, stumbles, and recovers himself by *laying his hand on a desk or against the wall*. Gloves, rubbish, his hands must be free, the perspiration has made the gloves sticky, and he tears them off in order to move more quickly and surely, and thus inevitably numerous imprints of the tiny, terrible network of lines and whorls are left behind.

And so it is with everything. Only lately, in Paris, a man committed a murder with unusual cleverness, every little detail had been carefully rehearsed, but, when pulling from under the bed the trunk with the money for which he had come, the bedrail stripped his cap from his head. At that moment he heard someone on the stairs, and, without stopping to think, he went through the window at a single bound—forgetting the cap. That moment's oversight cost him his life.

So there it is: according to the evidence, no crime has ever been, nor ever can be, committed without leaving behind some glaring clue. But—as in the Reading murder—ignorance of police methods may cause certain persons to destroy a profusion of perfect clues, and the murderer is not caught. If the truth be told, secrecy in some countries is insisted upon by the police merely because they believe, wrongly, that, like the conjurer, who dare not reveal the manner in which his results are obtained without robbing them of half their impressiveness, so they must shroud their activities in mystery. This is but childish vanity. In Paris and Berlin, at any rate, the heads of the crime departments are proud of their science and ability, and ask no better than to pull aside the veil. Charlatans may find it necessary to depend upon mystery, not scientists. Therefore, having carefully examined the arguments on both sides, I have decided to relate some of the strange and wonderful investigations of which I collected and recorded the details during the years that I studied the methods of the great Alphonse Bertillon.

THE AUTHOR.

**EPISODE I**  
**THE DEVIL'S TELEPHONE**



## THE DEVIL'S TELEPHONE

My chief was dictating his final instructions to me before returning to Paris, when Captain Costebelle of the local gendarmerie hurriedly entered the room which had been placed at our disposal. He hesitated a moment before closing the door and coughed apologetically.

"I am sorry to disturb you, Monsieur Bertillon," he murmured, "but there is a man named Dufour, a charcoal-burner from the valley of Valdex, in my office, who declares he has just witnessed a most atrocious crime. When he heard that you were here with experts from Paris he insisted on speaking to you at once. The fellow is almost hysterical, and his ashen face and blue lips at first led me to think that he was either drunk or mad, but his story is so circumstantial that I cannot refuse to investigate."

"Then why come to me?" Bertillon replied irritably. "I have quite enough work to do, without listening to every crazy peasant who wished to pose a chief actor in an imaginary drama in order to make himself important. We have wasted a day here investigating a stupid problem which I could have solved in my office, and I wish to reach Paris by night. Besides, you know that what you suggest is quite against the regulations. You are in authority here, and should make your report to the *juge d'instruction*."

The police officer flushed hotly at the mention of the magistrate; already that morning he had been reprimanded for telephoning directly to the Quai des Orfèvres instead of first obtaining permission from the Prefect.

"I know that," he answered, "but Monsieur Domaine and I are not friendly. Besides, the fellow's tale is so grotesque that if it happens to be true I feel sure you will thank me for letting you know before the local authorities destroy all valuable traces in their usual blundering fashion. If a crime



has been committed their noisy and elephantine methods will warn the criminal and give him a chance to escape. I have always admired your wonderful skill, monsieur. *You* will at once infallibly point out the true solution, whereas we should accomplish nothing."

Bertillon smiled good-humouredly.

"That is what I call gilding the pill. I fancy the Irish have a word that expresses it even better, eh?" he asked, turning to me.

"Yes," I replied, "'blarney' is what you mean, but I didn't know it had crossed the Channel."

The gendarme grinned delightedly. "I have often heard my mother use the word; she is Irish. But I meant every word I said. *Monsieur Bertillon is a genius.*"

Rousseau nudged me slyly.

"I hope it will be more interesting than the case we've been working on," he whispered. "This Normandy village is a deadly place."

Rousseau was right. We had come to St. Pierre de Guise at an urgent call from the officer who now stood in the doorway shuffling his feet and looking foolish, only to find that it was just a sordid tragedy with not one single outstanding feature.

Seeing that his crude flattery had put our chief in a good humour, the captain turned and led the way to his office. As we entered I caught a glimpse of a man in rough fustian sitting near the window, with large, grimy hands pressed to his face. He sprang up with a quick violent movement the instant the door was opened, and remained with arms hanging loosely to his sides, looking from one to the other with a fearful, yet eager, expression. The whites of his eyes were strikingly accentuated by the film of soot that covered his features in large patches. The man's appearance was almost ludicrous, but the twitching of his facial muscles, the slight crust of saliva on his trembling lips, and the tense, frozen expression of terror visible even through the coal-dust, wiped the smiles from our faces. Here was horror, real unmitigated fear and horror, caused by some unexpected event which yet remained a tangible incubus, oppressing his senses.

The police officer laid his hand on the man's shoulder with a reassuring gesture.

"Sit down, my friend," he said; "these gentlemen are from the Paris Sûreté. Tell them your story and try to remember all the details. Here, drink a little of this first to steady your nerves," and he stepped to a cupboard and poured out a stiff dose of cognac. The charcoal-burner gulped it eagerly, then, as Bertillon drew a chair forward, he sank down with a groan, drew a coarse cloth from his pocket, and wiped his hands and mouth.

"I did not know that murder was so terrible," he began, addressing Bertillon, "until I saw one committed before my very eyes. About two hours ago I was coming through the forest with a load of logs. I sleep in a hut near my fires, and go out at dawn for wood. I was just crossing the sandy hollow near the Witches' Pool, and had stopped to light my pipe, when I suddenly heard a man laughing. Oh, but laughing! I say a man, but it sounded more like the voice of a devil. It resembled the noise I once heard a fellow make who had drunk raw spirits until he became mad. A mixture of scream and snarl. Of course I was startled, and twisted round quickly to see who was making that horrible noise. You know the valley, Captain?" the man queried, turning to the police officer. "It is a wide, round, open space. Nothing but rocks and sand. Trees won't grow there. People say it was once a place where witches and sorcerers met to dance. Lots of bones were found under the stones by a professor from Rouen. I know, because I helped him to dig them up.

"Well, although the horrible sound had been close by me, there was no one in sight. And still shrieks and groans and that awful laughter sounded in my ears; but the moment I ran to the edge of the forest it stopped. I searched among the bushes, running from tree to tree, but there was no one there. I gave it up at last, thinking someone was having a joke with me, and walked back to where I had left my wood. And then as I stooped to pick up the sack, you know, a wild yell came from behind me, and I heard someone cry, 'Alive still, are you, accursed witch? Alive and ready to torture me once more

with your crazy jealousy? I'll kill you and make sure this time that you don't come back!

"The words were quite plain, and as I looked up I saw, not ten feet away, a man dressed only in trousers and shirt, with a knife in his hand. It was one of those old-fashioned knives we Normandy peasants used years ago. This one had a curved black handle and a wicked blade that flashed in the sun. He was holding a woman by the throat and stabbing at her. I shouted, 'Stop, stop, you assassin!' and rushed towards him, but my foot caught in the rope I had used to carry the sack. I fell on my face in the sand, and when I scrambled to my feet the man and woman had disappeared. I ran all the way here to report what I had seen. The gendarmes think I'm mad, but I swear, sir, I am perfectly sane and sober. A dreadful murder has been committed.

"They told me Captain Costebelle was with detectives from Paris, so I waited to tell you my story. You won't think me crazy, will you? I seem still to hear those cries and that awful laughing. I know I shall never forget what I saw."

"Can you describe the man?" Bertillon asked, pulling out his notebook.

"Certainly, sir. He was tall and thin, with a short beard and black hair."

"He had no hat, then?"

"No, sir, and I noticed the trousers were dark grey and the shirt blue with a broad stripe."

"What was the woman like?" Bertillon questioned.

"I couldn't see the face clearly. He seemed to be swinging her from side to side, but she had curly hair and wore a white dress with long sleeves, almost like a nightgown."

"Are there any houses near the place where you say all this happened?"

"No, sir; no one lives in the forest but myself, and even my cabin is an hour's walk from the valley."

"Yet you say these mysterious people were only partly clad. In fact you suggest the woman wore nothing but a nightgown. Where could they have come from?"

"I don't know, sir, but I saw them as plainly as I see you now."

"You are sure you remember the exact words he used?"

"Oh yes, sir—they are still ringing in my ears."

"Very well. We'll come with you to this valley. Is it far?"

"Yes, several kilometres; we must walk through the forest."

"You have a car?" Bertillon asked, turning to Captain Costebelle.

"Certainly, sir; it can take you part of the way, but the path to the Witches' Pool is too narrow for a vehicle."

We alighted at the edge of a vast wood of oaks and silver birches and followed our guide to a clearing which looked like a prehistoric amphitheatre. Huge spear-shaped rocks fringed a flat, sandy space five or six hundred feet in diameter. Dufour pointed with trembling hand to a large sack lying not far away.

"There is where I dropped my wood; my pipe must be close beside it; and a little distance away is the spot where I saw the woman stabbed."

"Did she not cry out?" Bertillon asked thoughtfully.

"No, I don't think she did, sir. But then, he was holding her by the throat. Besides, I was so horrified that I don't really remember."

My chief beckoned to me, and we walked slowly towards the sack. Bertillon stooped every now and then and examined the footprints.

"So far the man's tale is true," he muttered. "The marks he left are deep and close together owing to the weight of the burden he carried." He picked up a burnt match. "That was when he tried to light his pipe, and there is the pipe. H—m—m, tobacco only partly ignited. Obviously he was startled and dropped it before he had taken more than one or two puffs. Now let us see where the man and woman came from. But take care not to step on their footprints."

A quarter of an hour passed whilst my chief examined the ground carefully within a radius of fifty feet. Abruptly he turned and looked at me with brows lifted in surprise.

"Not a sign," he exclaimed. "Yet on this soft ground they would leave clear impressions. Is the man mad after all? Absolutely nothing, nor any place where they could have hidden. Where did you see the crime committed?" he called to the charcoal-burner, who was standing with the officer some distance away. The fellow approached the spot where he had dropped his logs and gazed earnestly in our direction.

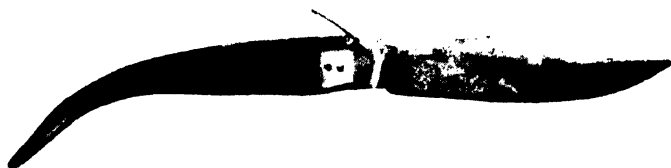
"Just where you are now, sir," he cried, after measuring the distance with his eyes.

While Bertillon looked around perplexedly, Rousseau bent down and tried to lift the heavy sack. As he did so he gave vent to a shout of surprise. "Come here, Chief: I can hear someone speaking!"

Bertillon and I both ran quickly to where Rousseau was stooping, one hand held to his ear. "You can only hear the voices when you bend down," he added. "Yet they are quite loud, and seem to come from the spot where you were standing a moment ago."

Bertillon knelt beside my colleague, his face flushed with excitement. Then he rose and gazed searchingly at the belt of trees. The unceasing monotonous drone and chirp of insects wove an undercurrent of sound against which the actual silence seemed the more oppressive. Only now and then from far away came the faint hum of a passing car. Yet there was some latent influence in the atmosphere of the valley that made me feel as though at any instant a nameless and fearsome power could erupt into violent action. For several minutes we remained motionless and expectant, then, with a shrug of his shoulders, Bertillon turned and walked towards the trees behind us. Rousseau remained kneeling on the sand, an expression of wonder on his rugged features. Abruptly he raised his hand and beckoned to me.

"Voices again, but much fainter!" he cried. "Here, near the ground!" He seized my arm and pulled me towards him. As my head came level with his it was as though a door had suddenly opened on a room full of people. First I perceived only a dull, unmeaning babble of voices. But as I bent still lower the sounds seemed to rush to a focus and increased in



THE BUTLER'S KNIFE FOUND BESIDE DE VERNEUIL ONE-THIRD NATURAL SIZE



THE STRANGE ACOUSTIC ROCK SHAPED LIKE A MOUTH



power. It was a confused clamour from which a man's voice detached itself, and I clearly distinguished the words "Monsieur, monsieur," repeated several times. Following upon this call came a pounding as of sticks against a sheet of metal. I could not repress a shout of surprise at the strangeness of it all. There we were in a sandy plain, no one but ourselves in-sight, yet I appeared to be surrounded by an excited, yelling crowd. When I shifted my position the noise instantly ceased. Again when I bent my head I heard the same inexplicable medley of voices—as though at that one spot I entered another world, invisible, but akin to our own. It was uncanny and terrifying. I turned to see what Bertillon was doing, and perceived him thoughtfully examining a queer concave rock which towered to a great height some distance behind us. His apparent indifference surprised me. I could not tear myself away from the fascination of this unprecedented phenomenon. The unconscious love of the mystic and supernatural which lies deep down in the fibres of every human being set my nerves tingling. And then, brutally and unexpectedly, as though the phantom door had closed again, the clamour ceased completely just as Bertillon came towards us. In his eyes was the gleam I knew well.

"We have stumbled by chance on a miracle of minute adjustment," he exclaimed. "What we hear is probably miles away. The sounds are reflected in some strange fashion by that lip-shaped rock near the trees, and come to a focus at this spot, and only here. How they travel across that sandy plain I cannot conceive. You are sure that you *saw* the man with the knife?" he demanded abruptly of the charcoal-burner, who was still standing motionless beside the gendarme. At the question he started as though waking from a trance.

"Certain, monsieur—absolutely certain. I'd know him again at once."

"Very well—leave your sack and come with us. We'll trace this devil's telephone to its starting-point. Spread out on each side and examine the ground, all of you; I'll walk in front. There may be footprints, but I fancy we shall find nothing until we get to the fringe of the wood."



Slowly we crossed the arena of fine sand, but the surface was smooth and even, and we saw nothing but some tiny trails where rabbits had scampered to cover. Bertillon halted a short distance from the first row of oaks.

"Look !" he cried, pointing at a broad granite slab. "This business grows ever queerer. I wonder if the formation is natural or whether the old Gallic priests conceived it ? This valley was undoubtedly used in their day for magic phenomena, and must have been the scene of many strange rituals. The stone is so placed that it relays and amplifies every sound that comes from the funnel formed by those trees. There is a long narrow passage right through them, and rocks have been carried there in the past so that nothing can grow to obstruct it. Yet from the opposite side the forest appears dense and continuous. What a discovery for our archæologists ! But for the moment we are hunting for a criminal. I shall return later and examine this strange place thoroughly."

Although we walked until noon, finally arriving at the broad departmental highway, we saw no sign of any likely spot where a struggle such as the woodsman had described could have taken place. At last Bertillon threw up his hands with a helpless gesture.

"It's no use. We shall never find the starting-point of those vibrations. Either the sounds transmitted by that prehistoric device are not caused by voices at all and the charcoal-burner merely imagined the laughter and screams, or else the spot from which they originated is far away. One thing is certain : the scene he described so vividly was nothing but an hallucination created by the mysterious and terrifying nature of the acoustic phenomenon. He only fancied he saw the woman stabbed. A species of subjective impression, if you like."

"But I also heard someone speak," I objected. "I distinctly caught the word 'monsieur' repeated several times."

"Well, perhaps you did. We all heard something. Those stones are unquestionably a species of primitive telephone. Probably there was once a pagan god or an oracle in the valley. Dufour may thus actually have heard all that he related, but

I am convinced he only imagined the episode of the man and woman. Anyway, if a crime has indeed been committed, we shall learn of it. Meanwhile we can do nothing but wait, and our work in Paris is urgent. At present the chances are a thousand to one against finding the exact point of emission. I have heard of whispering-galleries, but in every case there was a wall to carry the sound. Here it apparently jumps from point to point." Turning to the captain of gendarmes, he added: "I advise you to say nothing of all this to your *juge d'instruction*; he would only laugh at you. If there should be any development, inform me at once. It would be wise to keep that fellow Dufour from talking also. If there has really been a tragedy enacted somewhere, the murderer is certainly unaware that the echo of it was carried in such an uncanny way through space."

Back in our familiar surroundings at the Quai des Orfèvres the whole adventure seemed incredibly fantastic. Rousseau summed up our thoughts by saying.

"Auto-suggestion, Chief, that's what it was. That sandy place is haunted."

But, for once, he was wrong. When I arrived at the Sûreté the next morning a surprise awaited me. Bertillon, Colbert, and Rousseau were standing beside one of our fast cars dressed for a journey, and immediately signalled me to join them.

My chief pulled a paper from his pocket as I hurried up.

"Listen to this!" he cried, and his voice had the shrill intonation which betokened great excitement. "From the *Courrier de Brest*, and I've had further details by telephone from our friend the Captain.

" 'Pierre de Verneuil, the last male descendant of one of the oldest Norman families, who had only lately inherited his vast estate, was found dead this morning in a wood in which he often hunted. His face was terribly swollen, as from some poison. Near him lay a knife such as poachers use, with a lock blade and curved handle. The body has not been touched, for the local authorities intend to call in expert assistance from Paris. According to the servants, Monsieur de Verneuil, who was a widower, but about to marry again, had been queer in his ways for some time, so that it may be merely suicide.' "

"So much for the newspaper report. Captain Costebelle telephoned early this morning and gave me a detailed descrip-

tion of the dead man, which, curiously enough, corresponds to the phantom murderer seen by the charcoal-burner. Come along, we must arrive before anything is moved."

At St. Pierre de Guise we picked up our friend the Captain, who had already sent for Dufour.

"La Ferrière, where de Verneuil lived, is twenty miles from here," the police officer said with a queer catch in his voice. "Fortunately it belongs to my circuit, and I have given strict orders to keep everyone away. The wood is part of the Verneuil estate and surrounded by barbed-wire fences."

Two gendarmes were on guard near the body, which was lying on its side in a curiously twisted, huddled position. The hands were clenched and purple, and the distorted features fully confirmed the theory that he had been poisoned. The moment Dufour caught sight of the face he started back with a hoarse bellow of alarm.

"I know him. Without a doubt it is the murderer I saw in the Witches' Valley. And the knife, monsieur—there is the very knife with which he stabbed the woman," and his shaking hand pointed to the weapon which lay beside the body.

"All right," my chief snapped. "Keep back, now, everybody."

For an hour Bertillon worked feverishly, alternately examining the ground, the dead man, and the dagger. Then he crept cautiously through the undergrowth, scrutinizing the ground at every step. He was gone so long that Rousseau began to mutter impatiently. I could see he was devoured with curiosity and eager to get to the bottom of the mystery. At last the snapping of twigs and rustling of leaves informed us that our chief was returning. He emerged suddenly from the bushes, flushed and breathless, but a glance at his face showed me that the investigation had not proved successful. Without a word he brushed past us and picked up the knife by the point.

"Smell this," he said, holding it under my nose. "What do you make of it?"

A queer but agreeable odour emanated from the weapon. It was like a mixture of Oriental perfume and fragrant spices.

I looked up perplexedly. "Would that be the poison which killed de Verneuil?" I hazarded.

"Nonsense, that's no poison! Ambergris, and some aromatic drug. Besides, he has not been stabbed. There are several tiny, swollen punctures on his wrist and inside his left hand, but the knife did not make them! They look more like marks such as the fangs of a venomous snake would leave. Devil take the charcoal-burner and his silly story. There is no sign of a dead woman. I could not follow de Verneuil's footprints beyond the gravel path. Have the body carried to the house, Captain, and apply for a search warrant. Telephone to Paris, Rousseau, and request Doctor Maupert to come here at once with the necessary instruments for a post-mortem. Lebrun had better come with him. Explain what we have found and tell him to bring a microscope and his chemical-case. I shall not wait for the magistrate's order, however. We'll examine the house and question the servants immediately. What is the name of the woman de Verneuil intended to marry, Captain?" Bertillon asked abruptly as the officer was about to go.

"Mademoiselle Hélène Vautrais. She is an orphan, and lives not far away."

"I should be glad if you would request the lady to come to the house, then. I must question her. I shall not need Dufour until I have more data, but tell him not to go back to St. Pierre. I may require him when the lady arrives."

Placing the knife in one of our special cases, Bertillon passed his arm through mine and led me towards a huge grey dwelling, half castle, half manor, which loomed through the trees in the distance.

"This looks more like a case for a priest than for a detective," he said with a short laugh. "A peasant stops to light his pipe at the one spot where sounds produced twenty miles away come to a focus by means of an incredibly strange combination of acoustic mirrors. The cries and laughter so impress him that he becomes mad and fancies he sees a murder committed. The vision, delusion, mirage, or whatever it was, enables him to describe accurately a man and a weapon which are found the next day. The man is dead, and the only apparent cause

for his death are punctures in his hand that look like the bite of a poisonous reptile. Beside him is a knife—the knife seen by Dufour ; but instead of bloodstains on the blade, there is a strong smell of ambergris. Truly we of the Sûreté have grappled with many strange and grotesque problems, but this one bids fair to stand alone.”

“Remember the Raphael Cortez case, sir,” I ventured. “You said you would never believe in the supernatural again.”

Bertillon pressed my arm and chuckled. “I do not for a moment believe this crime to be anything but the result of a fantastic and complex chain of circumstances. If that fellow really killed a woman it is for us to find who she was and where she is hidden, but at all events he appears to have been murdered, and, if so, I intend to discover who did it. Here we are.”

We had arrived at a huge iron-studded door of forbidding aspect. My chief pushed it open and we entered a vast hall, dark with heavy beams and oak panelling. Sitting forlornly on a long bench were three men and a girl. We learned that they were the only servants de Verneuil had retained when he inherited the estate. All were loud in their praises of the dead man’s generosity, but agreed that he suffered constantly from spells of melancholia, when he would send them all to their quarters and forbid them to enter the main dwelling. At such times his moods would veer abruptly from a mere desire for solitude to fits of insane rage from which even the sturdy foresters would flee in terror.

Only the butler, a quiet, shrivelled, grey-haired man, typical of the Normandy peasant stock from which he sprang, appeared singularly reluctant to talk about the dead man, but Bertillon possessed the ability to adapt his manner to the whims of those he wished to question, and succeeded in breaking through the old fellow’s reserve. His name was Thomas Ladigue, and he had served the family for forty years. Pierre de Verneuil, we learned, had spent most of his life in Egypt and Tunis, where he had married a very beautiful and wealthy Greek. From that moment constant misfortune dogged him. His business, which had been prosperous, declined rapidly in spite of unceasing toil. He had come to France in obedience

to an urgent summons from the family's legal advisers, only to find that he was in danger of losing the heavily mortgaged estate which he had but lately inherited. Then, just as he was about to return to Egypt, the news came that his wife was dying. He arrived too late to see her alive again.

Thereupon de Verneuil had definitely settled down at La Ferrière. It was rumoured that the dead wife's money had enabled him to free the estate from the incubus of ever increasing liabilities. "There was a portrait of a very beautiful dark-eyed woman in master's bedroom," the butler added thoughtfully. "It was always hidden by a velvet curtain, but once when I entered in response to the bell I saw Monsieur de Verneuil standing before it with a corner of the drapery lifted. His expression when he turned and saw me was so terrible that I dropped the letters I had brought and ran from the room."

"He was still mourning her loss, you think?" Bertillon asked. A mixture of doubt and aversion flickered across the butler's face.

"I cannot say, monsieur—but—well, on that day it had seemed to me as though he hated her. The next morning the maid came to me with the news that the painting had disappeared."

"Well, that is natural enough, since he was about to marry again. He would not wish to offend his fiancée by keeping the picture where she would constantly see it. What kind of woman is this Mademoiselle Vautrais?"

"Very proud and reserved, monsieur. The Vautrais were once great aristocrats. But it would never have been a happy union. She is not liked in the neighbourhood. No one ever saw her smile. He needed someone young and jolly. However, poor master Pierre is dead. It breaks my heart to think of that. I was already here when he was only a lad, lively and full of mischief."

"Have you any idea who killed him? Did anything occur within the last month which would help us to discover the murderer?"

The butler's face assumed a stony, wilfully stupid expression,

and he shook his head slowly. "I am only an old servant, sir ; I know nothing of my poor master's private affairs."

Bertillon shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well, conduct us to his study and bedroom, and when my men come, send them to me. By the way, did you ever see any other woman here, any visitors more than usually intimate ?"

"Never : Master lived a very quiet life. Hunting and fishing were his only pleasures. There was no other woman."

Bertillon nodded, and, preceded by the servant, we climbed the wide staircase to the first floor. The study was a large room with countless books on shelves and in cases. Near the window stood a large old-fashioned writing-table ; several comfortable chairs were scattered about, and in a corner was a typewriter on an American roll-top desk. Signing to the butler to leave us, Bertillon walked slowly along each wall, examining the volumes.

"A man's books are a certain guide to his character, but these were here before de Verneuil came. I do not think he read much. Sit down while I examine his papers."

De Verneuil had been a tidy man, and, as letter after letter was unfolded and put away again, Bertillon gave vent to his growing irritation.

"It's not likely that so methodical a man will have left anything compromising lying about, yet—— Ha, this is curious!" he suddenly exclaimed. "A letter of advice from a shipping firm in Marseilles and a bill for the transport of a coffin. Good heavens ! Here pinned to it is a permit from Egypt and a second one from our own people authorizing the admission into France and interment in the family vault of Mademoiselle Eulalia de Verneuil, deceased in Alexandria."

Bertillon sat down heavily and pulled a cigar from his case, an unusual proceeding. It was the first time I had seen him smoke when busy on an investigation. I was about to leave the room, for I knew from long experience that he disliked to have anyone near him when mentally reviewing all the points of a complex investigation, but as I opened the door Rousseau came bustling in to report that the doctor and our analyst,

Lebrun, would arrive shortly. The body had already been carried into the house and placed in the billiard-room adjoining the hall. Bertillon waved us away impatiently. "We must wait until Dr. Maupert discovers how de Verneuil died," he exclaimed. "Sit down and keep quiet."

We subsided into chairs and watched our chief anxiously. His eyes closed, and after a few puffs the cigar remained unheeded in a tray. To anyone unused to his ways Bertillon would have appeared to be asleep, but I knew that when his active brain grappled with a subtle problem his body became an inert shell. In fancy I followed the invisible, yet unerring, mental processes of his extraordinary mind until I became lost in a drowsy maze of theories. A sharp exclamation from Bertillon caused me to leap from my chair in alarm. He was standing before me with flashing eyes. His face was twitching, and twice he moistened his lips before he succeeded in articulating clearly: "I've got it—I do believe! Where is that knife?"

I handed him the box in which it had been placed. He laid the weapon on a sheet of paper and examined it eagerly with his lenses, muttering incoherently to himself.

"Call the butler," he ordered abruptly, replacing the weapon with an air of finality.

I was about to obey, when the old man himself opened the door and ushered in a tall, austere woman with handsome, regular features, although there was something repellent in the thick-lipped mouth and knitted brows.

"Mademoiselle Vautrais," he announced.

Bertillon bowed. "You were affianced to Monsieur de Verneuil, I understand," he said courteously. "Sit down please, mademoiselle; I should like to put a few questions to you."

"Have you discovered yet who murdered my poor fiancé?" the woman queried in a singularly hard, metallic voice, choosing a seat which placed her face in deep shadow.

"I think so, mademoiselle. Tell me, did Monsieur de Verneuil ever speak about his dead wife to you?"

The woman started nervously.



"That is a strange question to ask of me. What has a dead woman to do with this matter?"

"I may be able to tell you that later. For the moment I beg you will answer me. I take it he did speak to you about her and that the subject was the cause of a quarrel between you? Am I right?"

"We did not quarrel, but he spoke to me about her after I had consented to marry him. I knew he was a widower, of course. One day he mentioned that there was a stipulation in her will that her body should be brought to France and placed in the old family vault if he ever decided to marry again. I did not like the idea, and told him so. I know he corresponded with her lawyers about it and received several letters which upset him very much, but he would not tell me what they contained. I believe, however, that her money was to revert to charities if he failed to carry out this condition. Since he had already spent large sums in clearing off the principal mortgages and restoring a ruined wing of the manor, the reimbursement of these sums would have placed him in a very difficult position. Nevertheless, he finally agreed to give way to me. You see, a woman has strange intuitions. I am convinced his wife inserted that clause only because she believed that the arrival of her body at the moment he was to marry again would make her presence a very tangible thing, and cause him to feel he was being unfaithful to her memory. She knew his mystic, superstitious nature well. If it did not cause him to break off his engagement, it would at least make him very unhappy and perhaps lead to quarrels. She must have been cruelly jealous, and possessed the subtlety of the Orient. Otherwise why did she not request him to place her coffin in the family vault immediately after her death? You understand, don't you? If he had done that, her memory would not have been revived in such brutal fashion just when he had every right to forget."

"And did he make arrangements after all for the transport of her body to France?"

"No, no—he did not. He would have told me so."

"Thank you, mademoiselle. May I request you to

leave us a moment? I should like to ask the butler something."

The woman rose at once, but the glance she shot at us from the door was hard and hostile.

The old butler had stood listening to all this with an ashen face. He looked at my chief now with terror in his eyes.

Bertillon smiled in friendly fashion, "There are only one or two details I want to be sure about, Monsieur Ladigue," he said reassuringly. "You stated that—— By the way, here is your knife," and with a quick movement he held out the weapon found beside the dead man. The butler made a half-step forward, then he cried wildly :

"Yes, yes, it is mine—but I didn't kill my master !"

Bertillon gave him no time to recover.

"Come, my friend," he said sharply, "you must tell me all you know. I am not suggesting that you murdered de Verneuil, but you helped to carry the coffin to the vault."

The old fellow looked round at the door to see if it was shut, then, with a gasp, as though impelled to answer against his will, he whispered: "Yes, sir, but I swore an oath that I would tell no one. My poor master fetched the body from Paris at night in his own car, and together we carried it to the vault under the family chapel."

"Well, what then ?"

"Nothing, sir. It was almost dawn when we had finished, and I left him alone at his request. He wished to pray, he said. I never saw him alive again. He did not come to breakfast, but I had seen that he was in one of his black moods, and I did not dare to disturb him. But towards noon I went to the chapel with the chauffeur and a gardener. The vault was locked, and no sign of my master. We pounded on the door and called him, but he had gone. In the evening one of the foresters reported that he had seen a man running across some fields dressed only in shirt and trousers. I remembered then that Monsieur de Verneuil had taken his coat off when we moved some of the heavy oak coffins in the vault to make room for the one he had brought. I immediately organized a

search-party. We hunted all night and came upon him at dawn as you saw him—dead.”

“How did he come to have your knife?”

“I lent it to him in the vault to cut the ropes round the outer case.”

Bertillon nodded thoughtfully, then he went to the billiard-room and returned a moment later with a large key.

“Is this the key of the vault?” he asked.

“Yes, sir.”

“Very well—I fancy that is the car from Paris which has just arrived. Show both gentlemen in here. Then get ready to come with me to the chapel.”

Dr. Maupert came bustling in with his usual cheery smile, followed by Lebrun carrying a microscope and a bag filled with reactants and test-tubes.

“Get to work on this knife, *mon ami*,” Bertillon said briskly, handing him the butler’s knife. Lebrun immediately cleared the table, placed a clean cloth over it, and began unpacking his implements. Bertillon watched his preparations interestedly for a moment, then he led Dr. Maupert into the room where the body lay.

I sat down beside my colleague, who had already adjusted a slide, on which he had placed some minute particles scraped from the edge of the blade. Almost immediately he peered over his glasses at me with a queer expression.

“Epithelial,” he said. “Particles of dried skin and embalmers’ spices. Who has been cutting up a mummy?”

“What?” Rousseau and I cried in unison. “Mummy? What do you mean?”

“What I say. There are traces of skin—human I should say—and several particles of costly embalmers’ spices on this knife.”

“That’s what I thought!” Bertillon cried from the door. “Call the butler now and bring lanterns. We’ll get to the bottom of all this at last.”

At the door we were joined by the captain of gendarmes, who had returned from St. Pierre de Guise with our search warrant.



MADAME DE VERNEUIL WHOSE INSANE JEALOUSY ENABLED  
HER TO DISCOVER A METHOD OF MURDERING HER  
HUSBAND MONTHS AFTER HER OWN DEATH



THE ONLY PORTRAIT OF MONSIEUR DE VERNEUIL WE COULD  
DISCOVER. IT WAS ON HIS DRIVING-LICENCE



"I have also brought an order for the arrest of the murderer," he cried boisterously. "The *juge* filled it in at my request. I know you've cleared up the mystery by now. The name is left in blank, of course."

Bertillon smiled grimly at the officer's sally, but made no remark. Preceded by the old butler, we marched through the park until we came to an old ruined building with unglazed barred windows standing in a clearing. Here Bertillon motioned us to wait, and advanced alone, illuminating the ground with his electric torch. Twice I saw him stoop to pick up something from the path. The second time he called to Rousseau to cut a short stake from one of the bushes, which he drove into the ground to mark the spot.

The vault was at the bottom of some crumbling steps under a small stone slab and protected by an iron door. The moment this was opened an overwhelming wave of sweet spices swept over us. It was so dense and cloying that we gasped for breath.

Bertillon lifted his light and pointed dramatically at the body of a woman lying against a stone column supporting the roof. While we stood gaping in amazement at the unexpected sight he stepped quickly forward and dropped to one knee.

"Beautiful, beautiful!" he cried. "It is the most perfect example of the embalmer's art I have ever seen!"

We crowded round our chief and gazed in wonder. Bertillon was right. The handsome, swarthy face might have been that of a woman asleep. Not a blemish, not a stain was to be seen. The lips were red; on the olive skin was the hue of life; and the eyelids with their long lashes almost appeared to quiver. Dark, silky hair framed what would have been an exquisite picture, but for an expression of feline cruelty and sneering triumph which pervaded every line and muscle. Silently we waited while Bertillon examined the uncanny face with light and lens.

"Some kind of enamel has been applied to the skin. It is hard, like porcelain—listen!" and the point of his fingernail produced a sharp sound as he tried to scratch the carmine cheek.

His contemptuous attitude grated on my nerves, but I was soon to understand what caused it.

Now as I stooped lower I saw that the white gown, which was fastened around the throat by a golden brooch, was slashed and torn, and beneath it were numerous gashes, obviously made by the knife Lebrun had examined.

"Come here," Bertillon called, beckoning to the butler, who was gripping Rousseau with frenzied hands as though seeking to draw sanity from the contact.

"Stand up, man! There is nothing to be afraid of—this woman has been dead many years. You saw that painting once. Tell me, do you recognize the face?"

"Yes—yes, sir. It is the same. But you are wrong. Mme. de Verneuil must have been alive when we carried her in here."

Bertillon gave a short laugh and walked towards a heavy oaken coffin. Although all the screws had been withdrawn, the lid, surmounted by a great silver crucifix, appeared to be tightly shut. On the ground not far away lay a second outer shell.

"Did you help to unpack it?" he asked, turning again to the terrified butler.

"No, sir—master would not let me break the seals. I remember he tested them all to make sure they were intact."

Bertillon examined the rough outer case. "Yes—I see they are Government seals. The harbour authorities merely verified them. Every possibility was foreseen. What a devil she was!"

Pulling a hammer from his pocket, he began to tap the coffin. I don't know what it was we expected would happen, but our chief was evidently following a definite plan. After a while he desisted and scrutinized the top and sides again; then, with a long-drawn "ah", he stooped and picked up a small silver key.

"Give me a pair of pliers, Rousseau," he said quietly. With these he grasped one end and inserted it in a lock which I had not noticed until then. It was evidently a spring lock, for the key would not enter, although he exerted considerable pressure.

"Push against the crucifix with a piece of wood," he cried sharply, "but don't approach too closely." Abruptly, as Rousseau obeyed, there was a vicious snap, the key turned, and, like a flicker of light, numerous tiny sharp teeth stabbed through the wood around the lock and from the silver cross. At that Rousseau shouted in alarm and staggered back. At once the entire lid lifted and swung open with a metallic clang and a species of hinged frame rose a foot or more from the empty coffin.

Bertillon dropped the pliers and wiped his hands and face with a handkerchief.

"What a diabolical contrivance! You understand, don't you? This woman whose body we have just found must have been tigerishly jealous. When she learned that her days on earth were numbered she made up her mind to prevent de Verneuil from marrying again. We shall find out what the exact stipulation was, but evidently he had to place her coffin in this vault and open it for a last good-bye if he really decided to take another wife.

"She must have prepared it all long before she died. I daresay she knew all about his mortgaged estate and depended on his need of her money. Once he had spent part of it he was compelled to submit to the clause in her will. She knew also that he would wish to be alone when he opened the coffin. When he tried to insert the key he naturally placed his hand on the crucifix for purchase, and those steel fangs, which are undoubtedly poisoned, pierced his skin. At the same time the lid swung back as you have just seen, and the body, which rested on that hinged frame, rose as though alive. No doubt the man became mad at the vision of this phantom from the past and stabbed at her. It was his insane laughter which the charcoal-burner heard. I found a shred from her gown and some of her hair on the path outside.

"He must in his frenzy have dragged the body out into the open and then flung it against the column where it now lies. *De Verneuil was murdered by his dead wife, and the murder was premeditated!* Well, she is beyond the reach of human justice, and our investigation must end here. Come, we have endured



enough for to-night. To-morrow we shall test the curious acoustic phenomenon which led us to this place. Without it we should never have discovered how the man died. I believe this crypt to be the starting-point of the aerial whispering-gallery.

"We will place the body of that she-devil in her death-dealing coffin for to-night, and leave it open. To-morrow workmen shall break those steel fangs and destroy the mechanism. I will also let you have my report, Captain Costebelle. Here is your warrant. Inform the magistrate that we could not make use of it."

We all gave a sigh of relief as the heavy door of the vault slammed shut behind us.

My nerves were badly jangled, and I slept little. I was ready to start, therefore, when my chief summoned me. Rousseau had left for St. Pierre de Guise. It had been arranged that he should note the exact moment at which he heard Bertillon speak, so that we could determine the spot which formed the acoustic base. At noon he returned with copious notes. It was truly from the old Norman vault that the sound waves started on their extraordinary journey through space. They reached Rousseau standing in the Witches' Valley two minutes later. He recognized our voices and was able to understand every word. Bertillon spent several days searching for further stones, which he believed must have been placed at calculated intervals to relay and amplify sound, much as an echo is tossed from peak to peak in the mountains, but he was unable to find them. Nor could we ever clear up the mystery of the charcoal-burner's vision. He was taken by the gendarmes to identify Mme. de Verneuil, and declared emphatically that, although he had not seen her face, he recognized the hair and the white gown with the long sleeves.

Bertillon's theory that what Dufour thought he saw was due to a species of telepathy was the only credible explanation, but it satisfied no one.

**EPISODE II**  
**THE MYSTERY OF THE FLOATING BODIES**



## THE MYSTERY OF THE FLOATING BODIES

"This case of the curious acoustic stones in the Valdex Valley seems to have given most of our rural police the impression that I am infallible," Bertillon said to me with a whimsical smile when, as usual, I brought him the result of my daily task.

"You mean the Devil's Telephone?" I queried thoughtlessly.

"Yes—since you have been so absurd as to label it with that dramatic name in the archives. It should be classified as 'The case of Eulalia de Verneuil'. You Anglo-Saxons are supposed to be unemotional, but—well, we won't discuss that just now. Here is a long telegram from Brigadier Grandjean, who patrols the Vaucluse district. The headless body of a Provençal, Carlo Rigaud, a wine-grower, well known in Cavailon for his clever experiments in scientific agriculture, has been found in an old Roman well. Definite identification was only possible because of some tattooing on his arm. Grandjean has also telegraphed the doctor's report. It seems the head had been severed most skilfully, low down near the shoulders, and, although a minute examination was difficult because the body had lain several days in water, it appears that the murderer cut between the second and third cervical vertebræ, whether intentionally or by chance is not clear. The strange thing is that there is no wound on the body, although the doctor believes Rigaud was either dead or unconscious when the head was removed, since the manner in which this was done would take some time. No trace of the head has been discovered. Grandjean requests me to come if I can, because he has found no clue of any kind. He adds that the ground around the well has been carefully guarded, and beyond the removal of the body nothing has been touched."

I looked expectantly at my chief—the case promised display of Bertillon's wonderful skill—but he shook his head slowly.

"I don't see how I can undertake the investigation, although Grandjean was formerly in our department, and I'd like to oblige him ; I have so much work here. However, there is also a telegram from a lady named . . ." and he pulled a green telegraph form from under a paperweight. "Ah, yes—Arlette Lorrain.

*"Arriving at eleven please grant me interview Carlo Rigaud my fiancé."*

"Evidently Grandjean advised her to come, for the wire is addressed correctly. Well, this Mademoiselle Arlette should be here at any moment now—we'll hear what she has to say. Meanwhile fetch Rousseau. I may send you both to investigate. Probably I shall be able to direct you to a correct solution without leaving Paris."

I found Rousseau, but lately promoted to the rank of chief inspector, busy instructing a number of young detectives in the intricacies of his own peculiar methods. Rousseau had entered upon his career many years previously as a simple policeman, but his nimble wits and his dogged perseverance had quickly caused him to be enrolled as a member of the Criminal Investigation Department. Although he feigned to scoff at the scientific methods evolved by the genius of my chief, Alphonse Bertillon, this was only a pose. Rousseau was a true child of the Paris slums, and his knowledge of the haunts and secret retreats of the legion of malefactors infesting the great city was uncanny. His flaming red nose and bristling moustache gave him the appearance of a comic gendarme ; only his tiny twinkling blue eyes, that in moments of stress hardened and glittered dangerously, revealed the inner man. He looked up quickly as I entered, and studied my face a moment, then, with a wave of his hand, he dismissed his admiring pupils and slipping his arm under mine, drew me into the passage.

"Well, what is it ?" he growled. "Something exceptional,

judging by your exaggeratedly detached manner. You are a bad actor, *mon ami*."

"Well," I replied, laughing, "you know how things develop here. The chief has received a queer cable, and, although he also tried to appear indifferent, he is, I feel sure, keenly interested. Something about a headless body found in an old Roman well near Cavaillon."

"Cavaillon—where the melons grow! That's a far cry from Paris—not in our section at all."

"No, but Grandjean—you remember him—is directing operations, and wants Bertillon to take charge. I fancy the chief will send us to carry out a preliminary search."

Rousseau chuckled. "Excellent wine they make there, too. I hope you are right and that Bertillon sends us to do the spade-work."

We found the door to Bertillon's office shut electrically, and were compelled to wait until the snap of the bolt gave us our signal to enter. Sitting at the table I saw a deliciously pretty girl, with delicate, almost classical features, and a wealth of ruddy-gold hair. Her face was flushed, and tears glistened on her dimpled cheeks. She had evidently succeeded in persuading Bertillon to take up the case, for he turned to us at once and said crisply:

"Mademoiselle Lorrain has told me an extraordinary story. She was engaged to marry a medical man, Doctor René Coudois, but a year ago she broke off the engagement because Coudois had become unbearably jealous and suspicious. There was a scene—naturally—and the doctor swore that he would kill any man who found favour in her eyes. Several months passed, during which Coudois constantly pestered his former sweetheart with letters, alternately pleading and threatening; then he suddenly sold his practice and moved to Marseilles. Freed at last from the menace of his presence, mademoiselle met and fell in love with Carlo Rigaud. They were to have been married this winter. Now he is dead, and the young lady believes that her former lover, the doctor, murdered Rigaud. Without committing myself, I must admit that the manner in which—pardon me, mademoiselle—the

head was severed seems to make the theory that it was done by a surgeon plausible. I cannot go in person as yet, so you will leave to-night and report to me in detail." Then, turning to the girl again, Bertillon added: "I will do all in my power to bring about the arrest and punishment of the murderer, mademoiselle. Return home; I have your address; I promise to inform you of all that happens."

The girl clasped her hands in a pathetic gesture of appeal.

"Do not think me revengeful only, monsieur. My poor Carlo is dead, foully murdered, and nothing can alter that. But while the monster who killed him is free, I shall tremble night and day. I fear that I shall end in the same way."

Bertillon rose and conducted her to the door with a few reassuring words, then, when we were alone again, he made arrangements for our journey to Cavaillon the same night, giving precise instructions for our investigation.

Brigadier Grandjean was waiting at the station when we arrived, and it was evident Bertillon had telegraphed and reconciled him to the fact that he could not leave Paris. A car was in readiness, and after a hurried meal we immediately drove through the dry and dusty countryside to the spot where the body had been found. Everywhere in the vicinity we perceived vestiges of those great colonizers, the Romans: broken, ivy-covered arches that had once supported a broad massive aqueduct; round towers of which only the base remained, still upheld by their granite-hard cement, of which the secret has been vainly sought; and finally a well of huge blocks, quarried far away—the well of the tragedy. It was then we realized what Grandjean had meant when he complained that there were no clues. The path leading to the well was firm and stony, open fields dotted with olive trees stretched to the mountains in the dim distance, and only here and there a tumbledown shelter for shepherds and labourers showed that at rare intervals human beings actually visited this lonely place. Rousseau looked helplessly at me and shrugged his shoulders. "This is not Paris, *mon vieux*. I don't know where to begin. It is useless to look for any signs or footsteps on this ground."

"There are none," Grandjean interrupted. "I have spent hours examining every inch of it within a radius of a hundred yards. Only the well itself, and the body, can help us—that and an investigation of the dead man's past. You have already seen his fiancée?"

Rousseau nodded. "Yes. Very well, let us look at the old ruin, then. By the way, how did the body come to be discovered at all in this lonely spot?"

"It is not so lonely as you think. Shepherds come here regularly, because the water in that hole is always deliciously cool and clear."

Rousseau peered curiously into the crumbling shaft: "It is very deep, but I should like to go down. Will the chain bear my weight?"

Grandjean pointed to a rope ladder hanging from two stout hooks, and without further ado the old fellow disappeared down the sinister opening. Looking over the edge I saw the lamp he carried twinkling like a star, and a few minutes later his voice came to me in confused rumblings. It was impossible to understand what he said, and we waited patiently until his head suddenly emerged again from the gloomy hole.

"The water is unusually high. How was the body seen? Did anyone go down?"

"No," Grandjean replied. "It was caught in the chain by which the pail is suspended, and a farmer who came for water, finding he could not move it, summoned several of his men and brought pail and body to the surface."

"Then how do you know the head is not down there also?"

"Because when I found the water flowed in so quickly that we could not empty the well, I descended in the diving-suit kept at the power-house on the Durance. The well is fed by a stream entering through a hole among the huge boulders at the bottom. I searched carefully, but found neither head, weapon, nor clothes. I do not think I mentioned that the body was quite naked!"

Rousseau looked at the officer in surprise. "Naked, you say? That makes the case even stranger. You have questioned all the peasants, of course? A nude and headless body is not



easily transported. Was no strange vehicle seen in the neighbourhood ?”

“None—nor did any of the dogs which everyone hereabouts keeps for protection give the alarm. There are three fierce animals at that house you see by the road ; they are loose every night, but they did not bark on the night we believe the dead man was brought here.”

“Then let us see the victim. What enquiries have you made into the movements of this former sweetheart of Arlette Lorrain ?”

“He is being kept under observation, nothing more. I waited for you to come.”

The examination of the mutilated body was a futile proceeding. There were many bruises and abrasions, but these, the doctor declared, were made after death, probably by the fall into the well. I saw that the left arm was indeed profusely tattooed, and it was this and the disappearance of Carlo Rigaud which had made identification absolutely certain. However, the vulnerable spot in all methods of premeditated murder is the premeditation. Countless small incidents leading up to such a crime inevitably form a well-defined trail to the assassin. And so it appeared to be in this instance. Carlo Rigaud had been highly esteemed, and, from all accounts, a lovable type of man, exuberant as are most southerners, but entirely lacking in their usual noisy and aggressive egotism. Only one man was known to have been his enemy—Dr. Coudois, the jilted rival for the hand of pretty Arlette Lorrain ; and our investigation quickly gathered many facts that pointed to the doctor as the murderer.

On the day before the body was found, and some four days after Rigaud was seen alive for the last time, the doctor had been observed driving furiously along the road leading to Cavaillon.

Beside him had sat a young man who appeared to be either intoxicated or very ill, for those who saw him were startled by his pale face and staring, expressionless eyes. No one had noticed the car after it had passed through the little provincial town where Rigaud resided, but late at night it had collided

with a farm wagon just outside Salons. Little damage had been done, but a violent acrimonious argument naturally arose between the farmer and the doctor. The quarrel had terminated abruptly when the doctor pulled out a handful of money, which he threw at the man's feet with a furious oath. The farmer declared frankly that the sum had been quite out of proportion to the damage done to his cart, but apparently Dr. Coudois had suddenly decided to put an end to the altercation because he had seen two gendarmes approaching. As Dr. Coudois climbed into the car, the farmer had caught a glimpse of a long package wrapped in black oilcloth lying on the back seats. According to this farmer, who knew of the gruesome discovery in the well, the bundle could easily have contained a body. There was only one flaw in our chain of evidence against the doctor: no one could state with any certainty whether the photograph of Rigaud, which we had obtained, resembled the man with the white face who had sat in the car when it passed through Cavaillon. But then, the glimpse the peasant had caught of the doctor's companion had necessarily been blurred and vague, for the vehicle passed like a flash. It was only the terrible pallor of the features, that had been in such contrast to the black-garbed and swarthy driver, which had burned itself on their memories.

Armed with a search-warrant, we thereupon called at the doctor's house. A handsome, dark-haired man of about forty received us courteously. But when we explained our errand, he attempted to bar our way, and his hand crept furtively to a hip pocket. Perceiving several uniformed police behind us however, he relaxed his tense pose and sank into a chair. Rousseau at once deprived him of a heavy and fully loaded pistol, which the man appeared to have been in the habit of carrying constantly, for the lining of the pocket was frayed and deformed, and several spots of oil proved that the weapon had been kept in good condition. For a time our search of the house seemed fruitless; we discovered, however, that a fire had been recently lit in the surgery furnace, and I collected some of the ashes and several shreds of cloth for microscopic examination. We were about to withdraw, when Rousseau knocked over a

large lamp upheld by an iron frame and enclosed in a glass hood. To our surprise a bundle tumbled to the floor amid the splintered glass, and when it was opened we saw it contained bloodstained surgical instruments carefully wrapped in oiled silk.

Only one further object claimed our attention; this was the usual doctor's diary on the table in the consulting-room. Turning to the date on which Dr. Coudois had been perceived driving through Salons with his sinister bundle, I noticed at once that an entry had been clumsily erased. It was a simple matter at headquarters to bring out the half-effaced words, and these appeared to be the last and conclusive proof of the man's guilt.

*Have made an appointment with C., was what I read; at all costs I must end this torture.*

Then, lower down, *Have written to her—a final appeal.*

Chemical tests disclosed that clothing had been destroyed in the furnace, which was used for the steam sterilizing apparatus; and the stains on the scalpels were human blood.

Thereupon Dr. Coudois was arrested and charged with the murder of his rival.

I immediately sent a detailed report of what we had done to Bertillon, fully expecting a letter of praise. Instead I received the following laconic telegram:

*Work badly bungled, arriving to-morrow. B.*

I handed this incomprehensible message to my colleague, and had the satisfaction of watching his face slowly redden.

"How helpless we are without the chief's brains!" he said. "I wonder what he means?"

"We shall know soon enough," I replied, crestfallen. "But I can see right now the holes he'll pick in our theory. Coudois must have noticed the tattooing on the dead man's arm, and if he went to the trouble of destroying the head and the clothes to prevent identification, why did he overlook that? Moreover, why on earth should he have hidden those instruments in the lamp instead of simply cleaning them and putting them back in their places?"

## THE MYSTERY OF THE FLOATING BODIES 47

It was late the next afternoon when the door of Grandjean's office opened and the tall, spare form of Bertillon appeared. He stood surveying us a moment, an ironical smile on his usually stern face.

Then he slowly shook his head, and this simple movement contained a world of meaning.

"I have spoken to the *juge d'instruction*, and to the prisoner," he remarked. "When I received your report I at once set the wires humming. The woman to whom he alludes in his diary is his sister. A nasty business, but it has nothing to do with Carlo Rigaud. The man in the car beside him was her lover, and the doctor was compelled to perform an operation that nearly caused her death, although it was perfectly legal. Both men expected Mademoiselle Coudois to die on the night they drove so madly through Cavaillon. Fortunately she recovered, and since then Coudois has done all in his power to keep her dishonour from becoming known. Thus, at the time when Rigaud was killed, the doctor was fighting to save his sister's life. He could have no better alibi. He would hardly have chosen that terrible night to commit a murder."

"What did my report contain that at once convinced you we were mistaken?" I hazarded.

"Why, the whole structure is full of absurdities. Fortunately, you described the instruments in that lamp very minutely, and I realized that they could not have been used to sever a human head; their nature disclosed the use to which they had been put."

"Then why did he hide them?" Rousseau grumbled.

Bertillon shrugged his shoulders.

"The man is sentimental, and he dearly loves his sister. Enough of that now; we have to solve the mystery of Rigaud's death. Did not the curious abrasions on the body suggest anything to you?"

"They were produced after death," I answered in surprise.

"That's just it. Well, well, I will come back to them later. You must take clear and enlarged photographs of the marks at once, then return here."

I had barely completed this work, and was packing my

camera and slides, when the door burst open and Rousseau came dashing in, his face working with excitement.

"Thank heaven the chief is with us!" he cried sententiously. "Come at once and bring your outfit. Another headless and nude body has been found in a small lake at the edge of the desolate La Cros valley."

"What! another body?" I exclaimed breathlessly. "A man or woman? Has it been identified?"

"A man—a young man, we believe, but so far we don't know who he is. Bertillon is there already with a doctor. A motor-cyclist brought the news five minutes after you left. I have a motor-car waiting."

Hurriedly gathering my implements, I climbed to a seat beside my colleague, and the powerful car at once roared away on its long, dusty journey. I had visited La Cros before: a vast, flat plain, strewn with gigantic boulders. A desolate uncanny place where nothing will grow, not even weeds, it has remained, shunned by man and beast, just as the great ice-fields of the glacial period left it in the days when the hairy mammoth roamed over France. Broken crags and yawning chasms encircle it and mark the borders of the Camargue country, where the best fighting bulls are bred for Spain. Our car finally bumped to a stop at the edge of a pool of translucent water overshadowed by a towering cliff, and I perceived Bertillon and the doctor kneeling beside their gruesome discovery. Some distance away a group of peasants were conversing excitedly with several gendarmes, whilst sitting on a boulder, continually mopping his pale face with a scarf, was a man equipped with rod and line for trout fishing; he it was, evidently, who had found the body.

Bertillon rose as I approached. "The head has been severed in the same skilful manner as the other," he remarked, and his eyes glittered.

"Photograph the abrasions on the skin at once. You will find they resemble those on Rigaud. The doctor will carry out a preliminary post-mortem when you have finished. He has found traces of opium in the viscera, and he believes that both victims were under the influence of a narcotic when

killed. It looks, moreover, as though they had been bound by broad straps fastened around ankles and wrists. The marks are very faint, so you must use our special method for bringing them out sharply on the negatives. Make several copies, intensify them, and copy again on plates, until you obtain clear prints. You see, I was right. This man has not been dead more than two days, and Doctor Coudois has been in prison since then. That proves his innocence, if proof were needed. It is curious, isn't it, that both bodies have been found lying in running water? Well, it is idle to theorize before we have something to go upon, but I feel sure this man was killed in a house and then conveyed here in some novel manner; the same applies to the unfortunate Rigaud. There is a rumour that a young German archæologist named Schaffner has not been seen lately. He had been staying at a hotel near Vaucluse, and was studying the formation of the hills and waterways. The first thing we must do is to obtain a list of the people residing in this neighbourhood who might be concerned in these mysterious crimes. A wine-grower and an archæologist! Fantastic, isn't it?"

I spent two entire days upon the delicate and engrossing laboratory work assigned to me, and the result fully justified Bertillon's belief that broad bands had pressed firmly on the wrists and ankles. These had left only faint traces on the skin, but the subcutaneous discoloration reacted on the colour-sensitive photographic plates when exposed under specially selected screens, so that when I had obtained a first negative and duplicated this many times on other plates, intensifying each in turn, the marks stood out boldly. When I carried the results obtained to Bertillon, he nodded approvingly.

"Opium has indeed been found in both bodies," he said. "It is fairly certain now that the second victim is the young German. We have been making enquiries in all the villages near Vaucluse and La Cros valley, and I am going to call on an old friend, a countryman of yours, by the way, although he has a French degree; his name is Doctor Hollyer. He was for many years at the head of an asylum at Ville d'Avray near Paris, but was compelled to retire, because, as so often happens, the influence of the insane he tended had begun to warp his

mental faculties. I remember that there was a queer rumour at the time of weird experiments tried on patients. He believes—and rightly so, in my opinion—that the brain is an entirely self-contained entity which would be omniscient and perfect were it not for the detrimental influence of the body. In other words, he attempted to prove that insanity is caused, not by a flaw in the brain, but by the action of some disease in the body which vitiates the blood. There was an indignant outcry in the papers when it became known that he had almost killed a patient by emptying his veins and then applying some process of blood transfusion from a living animal. Only the fact that the patient recovered and actually regained his sanity saved Doctor Hollyer from a prosecution. He resides now in a pretty villa on the hills above Vacluse.”

Whilst Bertillon had been speaking a vague, monstrous fancy had flitted through my subconscious mind. I tried vainly to grasp at the unformed thought, but it eluded me. My chief watched me intently, and apparently read my expression, for he smiled grimly.

“Yes,” he said, “something of the kind has been hovering in the dim recesses of my brain also. It has been there ever since my eyes fell on the words *Vacluse* and *Dr. Hollyer* in the list the police gave me of the people living in this district. I may be wrong—I hope so ; but these severed heads ! Well, we shall see. Come along, let us go there. I have sent Rousseau to fetch a car. Take a pocket lamp and some sandwiches. It is just possible that you may have to spend a night in the grounds of the doctor’s villa.”

Rousseau was already waiting beside a long, slim racer when I came down. He laughed harshly as his gaze caught the bulge of my hip pocket ; then he sprang in, there was a sudden crack, a roar that quickly swelled to a drone, and we were off.

“I fancy the chief wants to be sure he’ll be able to follow any vehicle !” my friend yelled in my ear. “He has some definite plan, but what it is I don’t know !”

For more than an hour the car skimmed along under leafy canopies of plane trees and oaks, then abruptly it left the road and began to climb, winding in and out of the hills, until I

saw, far beneath me, that mysterious gloomy funnel in the earth the natives have named *le trou de l'enfer*—the entrance to hell. It is a spot where a swift subterranean river comes to the surface after traversing countless mountains and forms a small lake at the base of an almost unscaleable cliff. Yet at some time there must have been a practical means of access to the countless black openings in the face of this cliff, where prehistoric cave-men formerly dwelt. At certain seasons the lake is almost dry, disclosing a yawning tunnel that no one has yet dared to explore, since, as the snows melt in the distant Alps, so a deluge of swirling waters will abruptly spout from it. It is this affinity between the level of the lake and the Swiss glaciers which has given geologists some inkling of the length of this fearsome shaft. We had skirted a massive spur of rock, when Bertillon leant forward and touched the driver, who at once stopped the car, and I saw to my surprise that the chief had brought prismatic glasses, which he now focused on the cliff. For many minutes he stood and examined a large cavern near the base, finally making some notes in his book; then, pointing to a white building surrounded by pine trees, Bertillon motioned the man to proceed. As we drew up near a large iron gate I had my second surprise. A dirty tousled tramp came shambling towards us whining for alms. It was Inspector Louys, admirably disguised, and a grin flitted over his face at my involuntary exclamation.

"The woman living with him is Catherine Pollack, Chief. No doubt about that. I arrested her in Paris five years ago. She was charged with espionage, but in reality we believed her to be a member of the band who murdered the Russian Ambassador. She was released for want of proof, and disappeared. Now she evidently aids the doctor in his experiments, because she generally wears the white dress of a surgeon."

Bertillon again consulted his notebook; then, turning to me, said:

"We make only a friendly call, you understand. You may come, because the doctor is your countryman; but Rousseau must stay here with the car."

Dr. Hollyer was a curious type. A tiny, shrunken figure,



almost a dwarf indeed, the fine intellectual face and massive head on such a body shocked the nerves as a thing that is utterly abnormal will do. But when the man spoke, I forgot his puny shape and disproportionate head. I have heard voices described as mellow and as golden, but for the first time I realized that these adjectives could be something more than mere figures of speech. His voice charmed—nay, it was hypnotic in quality. I found myself wishing he would continue to speak, and I felt convinced Bertillon had made a mistake whilst that sweet voice vibrated in my ears, but the moment he turned his back to conduct us to his study the spell was broken and I saw only a hideous shrunken monstrosity slipping with uncanny catlike grace over the thick carpet.

The conversation for a time was banal, but, whilst uttering polite commonplaces, Bertillon examined our host with swift, eager glances that probed and analysed. At last he led the conversation to dementia and those experiments which had caused Dr. Hollyer to seek this retreat, and on the instant I saw a cunning expression leap to the watery blue eyes that until now had gazed so frankly at my chief.

"All finished—done with," Dr. Hollyer said cheerfully. "I am banned, like a vivisectionist. So now I work on animals and an occasional monkey—I make the distinction purposely, for the anthropoids belong to the human species. Some day perhaps, I shall publish the results of my labours."

"Did you ever meet a young archæologist named Schaffer? I ask because he worked in this neighbourhood," Bertillon said suddenly. "He applied for permission to explore Hell's Hole. His body has been found. No doubt he met his end in that fearsome pit."

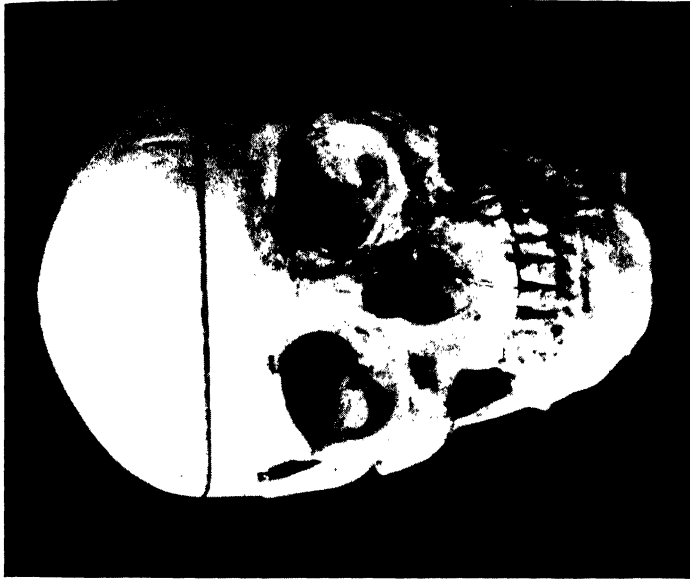
"How did you——" the doctor began, and stopped abruptly. "I heard a body has been discovered," he amended, seeing that Bertillon had risen and was gazing at a painting on the wall.

"*Hein?* I beg your pardon, this is surely a Corot? You were saying?"

"I said, how can you be sure it is the body of this German? Gossip has it that it was much mangled. I knew the young fellow. He called here once or twice. If I can assist you . . ."



DR. HOLLYER, FROM A SNAPSHOT PROBABLY TAKEN  
BY CATHERINE POLLACK



ONE OF THE SKULLS FOUND IN DR. HOLLYER'S HOUSE.  
IT HAD BEEN SKILFULLY PREPARED FOR A PURPOSE  
WHICH OUR DISCOVERIES IN THE LABORATORY MADE ONLY  
TOO CLEAR



"Thanks, no. Relatives identified some scars. In future the Prefect will refuse permission to all who wish to explore the subterranean river. Well, I am glad we met again after all these years. You must find it lonely living here by yourself?"

The doctor shrugged his puny shoulders.

"My books and my work—they are better than human companionship."

When we had gained the road after a ceremonious leave-taking Bertillon turned and looked at me meaningly.

"You heard, eh? Shall I complete the doctor's sentence? *'How did you know it was the German since his head was missing?'* We have taken every precaution that no one, besides the peasants at La Cros, should know of our discovery; and those peasants have been warned not to mention it. Besides, La Cros is far away. A beautiful voice and the cunning ferocity of a madman. It will not be a simple matter to prove this fellow's guilt. Poor devil—he is possessed by a monomania, of course. But we hope much from the woman, Catherine Pollack. Ah, the women—they are our greatest allies. Now listen carefully: I am convinced Doctor Hollyer severed those heads for experimental purposes. He would not consider such an act as murder at all. He is a fanatic."

"But—you just said La Cros is far away," I interrupted. "How could such a puny shrimp——"

Bertillon waved his hand impatiently. "Those bodies were dropped into the lake from the cliff. Scientists have long suspected that subterranean streams connect this lake with outlets far away. We have now a proof of that. Rigaud was swept along by the current of an underground stream until he came to rest in the old Roman well, and the pool at La Cros is another spot where such a stream comes to the surface. Could anyone imagine a better method for disposing of a body? Hollyer has lived here twenty years; Hell's Hole has no secrets for him. I suspect that he can reach one of those prehistoric caves in the cliffside from his house. It will be for you to watch the man's movements and try to discover which cave it is. There, I believe, we shall find the evidence we need."

"And you knew all this before you came here," I cried admiringly; "you brought binoculars of a set purpose!"

Bertillon's stern face softened. "I must not take too much credit. I have from time to time received reports about this extraordinary place, and I have visited it. The rest was a mere matter of reasoning. The doctor keeps no car, and he is a weakling. Moreover, he has only an old crone as servant and this woman Pollack who helps him in his experiments, therefore those bodies found in running water were not carried—they floated. Besides, Dufresne sent me a message by Louys informing me that two years ago Hollyer sought permission of the Rhone Prefect to experiment on the brain of a criminal sentenced to death, at the moment when the head would be severed from the body by the guillotine. When permission was refused, Hollyer contrived to make the acquaintance of the official pathologist, and on the very night following the execution this official's house was entered and the severed head, which lay in his surgery, stolen. Now join Rousseau and Louys—but be careful. Hollyer is cunning. I am afraid he guessed at the reason for my visit. Two of you must be constantly on duty while the other rests. A motor-cyclist will be in readiness day and night to fetch me should it be necessary. Here are my binoculars. *Au revoir* and good luck!"

I found my two colleagues lurking in a clearing from which a view of the doctor's house could be obtained. The afternoon passed tediously, no sound but the incessant drone of bees and the strident chirp of crickets broke the lazy silence, so, in anticipation of a long and fatiguing night, I stretched myself to sleep beside Louys, whilst the old brigadier kept watch. Dusk had come when I awoke, much refreshed, at a touch of his hand.

"We must split up," he growled. "You, Louys, had better find a hiding-place near the cave Bertillon examined as we arrived. We will climb into the grounds. That overhanging tree will be very handy in case you need us. One shall post himself behind and the other in front of the villa. Every two hours we meet here to report."

Rousseau's suggestion was good, but as the night crept on apace I began to feel singularly apprehensive, almost as

though with the dark some evil presence had invaded that sinister garden. It was nearly midnight, when suddenly my senses thrilled to a stealthy rustling and I perceived with a numbing shock that a figure, muffled in what appeared to be a black cloak, was gliding swiftly over the path to the gates. Like a shadow Rousseau slipped to my side and whispered, "That's the woman Catherine Pollack; the light from a window shone on her face as she came out. Stay here—I'll follow."

Hardly had he vanished in pursuit among the trees when something like an ape emerged from a bush and ran noiselessly after them with lithe, feline grace. I had seen that supple motion before—it was Dr. Hollyer! What insane errand possessed his brain, I wondered; had he seen Rousseau, or was he concerned with the woman only? Fearing for my friend, I wormed my way in turn through the trees, keeping the path in sight. A faint murmur of voices reached me as I neared the gates, and I perceived that the woman was engaged in earnest conversation with a man whose tall figure could be neither that of Rousseau nor the doctor. Somewhere both were hidden and spying on this secret meeting. I nearly yelled when muscular fingers unexpectedly gripped my wrist and a hand covered my mouth.

"Sh-h-h; not a sound," came a faint whisper, which, to my intense relief, I recognized. "The ape-man is over there. Lucky I heard him snarl and curse when he saw those two meet. You spoke of his voice; it didn't sound so sweet just now."

Hardly had Rousseau ceased whispering when the unknown seized the woman and kissed her, then he turned swiftly and disappeared, and as she glided towards the house we caught sight for an instant of a white, bestial face peering from the bushes and two clenched fists raised in silent rage. We crept along in the shadows with infinite caution, but it was unnecessary, for Hollyer had now abandoned all secrecy. Running over the lawn, he clutched at the woman's shoulder and began to curse and yell like the mad thing he was. For several minutes Catherine Pollack listened calmly enough, then, as though her patience had reached its limit, she suddenly struck fiercely at him and darted into the house. The unexpected

blow had sent the doctor reeling against a tree, but he quickly recovered and dashed after her.

"The door's open—he may kill her! Come!" Rousseau cried. The massive door was indeed wide open, and a tiny tinted lamp illumined the passage. From above us came the sound of angry voices; they covered any sounds we made and we were able to mount the stairs unnoticed.

"Your lover—yes, your lover!" we heard the doctor scream, and his voice had truly lost its former sweetness. "When I dragged you from the clutches of the police you swore to serve me in every way. Remember, I still hold the proof that you murdered Politchine. I'll give you up to the law!"

A strident, evil laugh burst from the woman. "*You* give me up to the police? Ha, ha, ha!—that is funny—with a dozen such abominable crimes to your account that even my soul sickens. You ghoul, I guessed long ago where you have installed your secret lair, and I know something of what goes on there. Suppose I carried my information to the Prefect?"

A tense silence that lasted several minutes followed this outburst. The terrible meaning in the woman's threat had apparently sobered the doctor, for his voice was soft and winning again when next he spoke.

"I am sorry, Catherine. I am jealous, madly jealous. I love you—and I am an old man. You must not accuse me of murder, Catherine. The ignorant world would call it that, but you know how great, how wonderful is the ideal I have pursued. What do the lives of a few human beings—men such as Schaffner and that wine-grower—matter, if I can discover the seat of the soul and prove that man does not die when his body is taken from him?"

"Good God!" I heard Rousseau mutter beside me. "We must not be found here. I'll watch outside whilst you send the cyclist for Bertillon. The woman is in no danger for the moment."

Softly we crept out of the house, and I hurried down the steep path to the village, leaving my friend on guard as before. Dawn was approaching when I returned, and to my astonishment found Louys and the Brigadier in excited conversation at the spot where the road overlooked Hell's Hole.

"We must climb the cliff!" Rousseau shouted. "Louys heard shots and saw flashes in the cave near the base. We have searched the villa ; it is empty. Not a sign of Hollyer, nor of his companion. Someone has been killed and thrown into the lake. We both heard a splash. Curse this darkness! We must risk it, although we shall probably slip and fall," and without further ado he began to scramble over rocks and fissures towards the yawning cavern just above the water. Fortunately the eastern horizon was already shot with lemon-yellow and pink, and a dim light was reflected from the hills, which guided our footsteps. I dared not look down ; a fall into that treacherous pool meant swift, inevitable death. Although the surface of the water looked so placid, I knew that remorseless currents and whirlpools would grip me with irresistible power and sweep me away into some fearsome underground tunnel. Louys shared my apprehension, but Rousseau's wild energy spurred us to follow. How we reached that troglodite retreat I do not care to remember, but reach it we did at last, just as a shaft of daylight struck the edge.

"Look !" Rousseau cried excitedly. "Blood and a revolver ! Step near the side—the chief must see this."

Flashing our lamps over the sandy floor, we perceived that the cave sloped upwards and that a smooth trail wound in and out among fallen rocks. But I realized at once that this could not be the doctor's secret retreat, because we had taken perhaps twenty steps, when a huge boulder barred all further progress. I gazed despairingly at this unforeseen obstacle ; not even a cat could have squeezed past it, and my disappointment was such that I gave vent to my chagrin in foolish curses.

"The devil must have come and gone as we did," Louys said tonelessly, "though it seems absurd that he should take the trouble to climb up here."

Rousseau was about to reply, when the welcome voice of Bertillon hailed us from the entrance, and a moment later he came creeping to where we stood, his eyes fixed on the ground. He, too, appeared dumbfounded when he saw the road closed, but finally he laughed and said :

"Those little footprints of the doctor all lead towards this



rock. He did not return; and look—there are smudges of blood on one side of the stone. The fellow was evidently wounded.”

With wondering eyes I saw my chief set his shoulder against the boulder and give a heave, and an instant later he sprawled on his face as the mighty block swung aside, oscillated slowly, and settled again on its base, apparently as immovable as before. But as it had swung sideways we had seen that a smooth wide tunnel opened behind. A second attempt to displace the stone proved more successful. Bertillon’s thrust had been altogether too violent, it needed but a steady pressure of the hand to give us access to the passage, and we quickly scrambled around this cunningly fashioned barrier.

“This is very, very ancient, I fancy,” my chief said, pointing to countless tiny chipped facets on the sides of the rock; “the men of a bygone age had already discovered and utilized this swinging stone, but no doubt Hollyer enlarged the tunnel and pierced a shaft which leads either to the grounds or to the house itself.”

Soon we had proof that this was so, for the rough sides vanished as we advanced cautiously, stooping under the low roof, to be replaced by bricks and stout beams; and in the distance our lamps revealed a door protected by sheet iron. Fortunately the massive spring lock that usually held it shut had not caught, and bloodstained strips of linen on the ground made it obvious that Hollyer had paused here to bind up his injury, convinced that the ancient rocking-stone would stop all pursuit. Bertillon flung the door wide and flashed the beams of his lamp around the room, disclosing white walls and tiled floor. We had at last reached the hidden laboratory. Two enormous lamps in ruby globes hung from the ceiling, and with a muttered exclamation Rousseau strode to an electrical switchboard and inundated the place with a brilliant red light. Strange instruments, microscopes, and test-tubes littered the numerous shelves. Glass cupboards filled with shining surgical instruments stood against the walls and a long immaculate operating-table gleamed weirdly crimson in the centre. But our gaze was held by a row of transparent cylinders at the

opposite end of the chamber. A dense web of fine insulated wires emerged from each of these cylinders and I perceived that they were connected to delicate appliances grouped around them, but what their purpose might be I could not conjecture.

Fastened to a broad shelf were several microphones of a novel kind ; above them hung queer vibrating mirrors that quivered incessantly and responded to our slightest movement, whilst high up in the centre, projecting from the wall, was a huge metallic trumpet. Abruptly as I made a step forward the vibrating mirrors swung round, focusing their ruby beams on my face, and at the same instant a loud musical drone issued from the trumpet. The effect was so startling that I instinctively threw up an arm to ward off some unknown danger, and at once, with a sibilant, unpleasant whirr, a number of tapering, slender tentacles that glittered with a lambent flame began to quiver and coil like a brood of living snakes. I saw then that before each mysterious cylinder were twelve such tentacles, and that they radiated from a species of central magnet, to which countless wires were attached.

"What in heaven's name does this mean?" I whispered fearfully. At the sound of my voice the drone increased in volume and those horrible antennæ jerked convulsively. We stood rooted to the spot, and my flesh crept with a nameless horror ; it seemed to me that an evil intelligence crouched among the wires. The same thought apparently struck Bertillon also ; pressing my arm in warning, he tiptoed inch by inch nearer to those incessantly moving coils, whilst we watched breathlessly, expecting every moment to see some monstrous creature leap from the shelf. And now the flickering mirrors turned towards our chief with swift, smooth motion as though guided by an intelligent purpose ; like staring bloodshot eyes they were, and the drone from the trumpet changed to a series of shrill notes that ran up and down the musical scale in a curious wild rhythm which reminded me of morse signals. At last Bertillon had reached the broad ledge upon which these uncanny appliances rested. A moment he appeared to hesitate, then he switched on his electric torch and flashed the welcome white rays on the row of cylinders. Instantly a wild

unearthly sound like the screech of a tortured animal issued from the metallic funnel just over his head, the lamp jerked from his hand, and he staggered back with a scream of fear and horror.

"God in heaven! Oh, the foul, inhuman monster!" he cried, and his voice broke and became a sob. "Those are brains—living human brains—floating in the jars! Switch off the light, Rousseau—quickly!"

A snap, and we stood in utter darkness. Slowly the agonized sounds from the fearful trumpet died away, and at last silence—broken only by our agitated breathing—settled again in that room of madness.

Waves of intense pain, such as one feels at the sight of a living body torn by senseless machinery, swept from nerve to nerve and robbed me of all strength to move. The nightmare vision Bertillon's words had created threatened to overwhelm me. I felt sick and faint and unable to speak. I thought of those hapless souls, deprived of all links with the outer world, except for the mechanical contrivances invented by Hollyer, yet conscious still in a dim way, and a frenzy of horror swamped my reason. Minutes passed whilst I fought for sanity, and I sensed that my companions were battling in like manner. At last Bertillon said in a low, trembling voice.

"I cannot, I *will* not believe that such a monstrous thing can be, that by some means that fiend has replaced our human organs by delicate electrical nerves connected with those brains, and that they are conscious . . . Faugh—no—the thought would drive me mad. Let us end this," and, springing to the switch, he seized a heavy bar of metal that lay on a shelf and shattered the jars and their contents in sudden rage and disgust, tearing and snapping the wires and striking madly at the mirrors and trumpet, until nothing but a heap of twisted metal and glittering broken glass remained. Only then did he pause and wipe his glistening brow; slowly, as though awaking from a nightmare, he grew calmer; and finally, ashamed of his emotion, he faced us with a rueful laugh.

"I forgot myself," he said. "Unhook those red globes from the lamps, Rousseau; they are hinged. Let us have white light and common sense. I was deceived by a clever trick,

but for a moment, those mirrors, those sounds that seemed to be trying to convey a message, and those creepy tentacles gave me the horrors."

"You were not deceived, Chief," Rousseau replied gravely when he had detached the ruby globes. "That was no trick. I don't understand—quite—but I remember now what Hollyer said to the woman. Somehow, conscious or not, those poor, bodiless, murdered creatures sensed our presence. And they were murdered because he needed them for his filthy experiments."

I felt my nerves quiver once more at the words, so quietly spoken, yet so full of terrible possibilities. Rousseau was not easily moved, but for once his face was ashen and his hands trembled.

Bertillon had recovered his balance, however; he shook himself like a wet dog and, pointing to a small door, cried, "After him! Our men are all around the house—he cannot get away!"

As our chief had foreseen, a narrow passage brought us to a cellar under the villa, and we had just entered the hall when loud shouts sounded in the garden and Louys came running up the steps.

"There is another exit, Chief. Hollyer is climbing the cliff. He may yet get away."

Like a cat, the tiny dwarfed shape of the madman was leaping from ledge to ledge whilst we stood helpless and watched.

"He may have a hiding-place among those caves," I said, "unless he is making for that terrible sandstone slope behind the lake. If he does that we shall get him, for our men are already on the summit."

But Hollyer had also realized that he was cornered, for, as Bertillon focused his glasses on the fugitive, a thin, long-drawn yell of defiance reached us. A moment the creature stood balancing on a narrow ledge, then, like a diver, he sprang into the air. Twice he rolled over, clutching instinctively at the treacherous surface, then stones, sand, and dust rolled with him in an ever-growing avalanche, until at last he came to rest buried under a huge mound of debris at the edge of Hell's Hole.

Bertillon shrugged his shoulders with a gesture of finality. "It's just as well. Let others dig him out. It will take a week at least. I am eager to return to Paris. I want to forget." Then, seized with a sudden thought :

"Good heavens, Mademoiselle Lorrain will be waiting to know if we have discovered who killed her sweetheart ! She still believes Doctor Coudois, whom you nearly proved guilty, to be the assassin. She must never know the truth. No one must ever know what we saw in that foul den below."

"People would not believe us," I remarked, "now that all is destroyed."

"No, I suppose not. Come, the car is waiting."

When we returned to Cavaillon we found that the unknown, with whom we had seen the Russian woman speaking at the gates, was waiting for us.

"Catherine Pollack is dead, monsieur," he said. "And I can prove it was Doctor Hollyer who shot her. The body has been found in a cistern—one of the many outlets from that lake where he has his secret lair."

"Hollyer is dead too," Bertillon replied, "so let the matter rest. Who are you ?"

The man held out a document with the stamp of the Paris Sûreté. "I am a secret-service agent from Russia. I was sent to watch Doctor Hollyer because it was he who killed Politchine, although he succeeded in throwing suspicion on poor Catherine Pollack in order to bind her to him. We loved each other, monsieur, and she had hoped that by remaining near him she would obtain proof of his guilt. But he was too cunning. He was a devil that aptly fitted the place he chose for a home."

When the man had gone Bertillon handed me the dossier and the exhibits of the case.

"Put these away," he said. "Mention only the fact that Hollyer was a homicidal maniac in the records. We are not sure of anything else, whatever we who saw that terrible laboratory may think. I have given orders for it to be walled up."

**EPISODE III**  
**THE RULE OF THREE**



## THE RULE OF THREE

I WAS already late for my dinner appointment, and still the stubborn cuff-link would not fit into the overstiff shirt : therefore my temper was rapidly degenerating. At last, hot and annoyed, I went to the door, intending to call my neighbour, Dr. Artois, a young medico only recently settled in the house. But as I stepped into the hall I was startled to hear a familiar voice growl querulously.

"Confound your stairs ! Why don't you have a lift or live on the ground floor ?"

It was Rousseau, chief inspector of the *police judiciaire*, and at his unexpected appearance I could not repress an exclamation of dismay, which elicited a loud chuckle from him.

"Aha, dressing for a jolly evening, eh ? It's lucky I came in time. I can also promise you an enjoyable evening, and an equally pleasant night."

"And that means a murder," I grunted angrily, "or you wouldn't come so late. I hope the assassin gets the maximum when we catch him. I shall miss an excellent dinner at the Cardinal with some charming American friends."

"Oh, I don't know, perhaps you may have the dinner if you promise to return to headquarters later. But first come along. Bertillon is away, and the whole responsibility of the preliminary enquiry rests on me. Dr. Maupert has gone to Lille with the chief also," and his eyes wandered to the brass plate on the wall.

"You know him ?" he asked. "Can he come ?"

"He'll be delighted with the opportunity," I answered. "Nice youngster, too, but crazy on detective yarns. I was about to call him to operate on this confounded cuff-link," and I held out my gaping sleeve. "By the way, why didn't you 'phone ?"



"I tried, but you're temporarily disconnected. Some repairs on the line. Ask Dr. Artois to come with us, then."

My ring was answered by a trim servant, and a moment later the doctor himself came to the door, brandishing napkin and fork.

"My dear neighbour, since my maid said you were in your shirt-sleeves, I thought I might come straight from my dinner. What is it, a patient?"

"No, doctor, a murder. If you care to act officially *pro tem*, we'd like you to come at once to examine the body. Dr. Maupert is away, and the matter is urgent."

The young practitioner's eyes gleamed with excitement. "Certainly, certainly. I recognize you, Monsieur Rousseau; your picture was published in the *Journal* in connection with the Lebel case. Give me five minutes to finish my meal and to pack some instruments."

"I'll leave my door ajar," I said. "I must dress too. Come in when you are ready."

Whilst I packed my outfit and prepared camera and magnesium spool, Rousseau gave me an outline of the crime.

"The *commissaire* of police in the Madeleine district sent a messenger to headquarters half an hour ago," he said. "A man named Batiste Coniglio, an Italian, recently engaged by Baron Octave Lafargue, the well-known financier, whose house is in the Boulevard Malesherbes, had just come running to the police station crazy with fear and excitement. His tale was that about seven o'clock, whilst he was standing at the street door talking to his sweetheart, he was suddenly startled by a shot and a cry of pain, which appeared to proceed from his master's bedroom. He at once rushed upstairs and found Baron Lafargue sprawling on his back in a pool of blood. His first thought was that there had been an accident, and, dropping to his knees, he raised his master's head. Although the man was still conscious, it was evident he was mortally wounded; the face was livid and distorted with pain, and great gouts of blood dripped from his hair. When the dying man perceived his servant he muttered in a faint voice, "Farquart—Gilbert Farquart shot me. Doctor Laineau—fetch him quick, and the police."

Batiste stayed only to push a pillow under his head and dashed off, since he knew that the doctor lived some distance away. Unfortunately Dr. Laineau had already left the surgery, so Batiste ran to the police station. The *commissaire* immediately sent for an ambulance, and then, hailing a taxi, drove to Lafargue's house accompanied by a policeman and the servant. But they arrived too late: the Baron was dead. Thereupon the *commissaire* telephoned to me, sent the ambulance away, and placed a gendarme on guard so that nothing should be disturbed."

Hardly had Rousseau finished his account when Dr. Artois came bustling in, and, since I was also ready, we at once proceeded to the scene of the tragedy. During the drive Dr. Artois bubbled with eagerness. It was a chance, a wonderful chance, he told us, to make a reputation for himself, if only the case was not too simple; and he fired a hundred questions at Rousseau, who refused stubbornly to talk.

"Wait, monsieur," was all he would say. "Apparently simple cases are often the outcome of cunning schemes, whereas seemingly strange, complex crimes are usually bristling with clues. It does not follow because Baron Lafargue was able to name his assailant that we have nothing to do but arrest the man. Only the servant Batiste was present when that accusation was made, and Batiste Coniglio was once charged with murder in his native Italy. He escaped with a very light sentence merely because witnesses supported his defence that he had killed to save his own life. I looked up the fellow's record before I left; it struck me that his uncorroborated evidence might be questioned."

"Don't let that influence you, Rousseau," I exclaimed uneasily. "You know how unreliable an opinion based on a man's past may be."

Rousseau grunted and opened the door of the car. We had arrived at our destination. Number forty-two Boulevard Malesherbes was a spacious, handsome building that dated back to the days of royal France, as the wrought-iron balconies and carved doors attested. At the gate stood a *sergent de ville*, who at Rousseau's question indicated a window on the second floor.

"That is the room, monsieur," he said. "A colleague is on guard in the passage."

I gazed critically at the façade. "A fairly agile man could climb up, if that is what you are looking for," I remarked. "It gets dark at five, but the house fronts a busy street."

"We'll examine the back of the building also," my colleague countered. "There is a garden, I believe."

The bedroom door was shut, and we knew it was hopeless to look for fingerprints on the polished handle, since police and servant had come and gone; nevertheless I examined it with my lens. A tiny smudge was visible on the inner knob, and on the carpet just beneath was the outline of a heel.

"Call Batiste," I advised Rousseau. "Ask if he has washed his hands since seven; if not, examine them."

Batiste Coniglio, a thin, pallid man about forty, came forward at once. He had been sitting in the dining-room under the guard of a detective. The fellow held out his hands obediently enough, and we saw that the right thumb was bloodstained.

"I lifted my master's head," he explained. "It was wet with blood. I daresay some of it also dripped on my clothes."

Rousseau nodded and entered the bedroom.

"Wait, please, doctor," he exclaimed. "I must have a look at the room first."

The scene to me was familiar: the murdered man sprawled grotesquely on his back not far from the bed, the sightless eyes staring at the ceiling. One leg was twisted under the other in a curious position, and the right hand pressed on the carpet. A broad pool had spread from the wound, which had been caused by a bullet of large calibre, fired, judging by the absence of powder-burn, from a distance of four or five feet and from behind, whilst Baron Lafargue had stood facing the window. The missile had entered the base of the brain and followed an upward direction. I noticed at once that the broad back of a heavy chair of the *bergère* type which stood beside a table covered with papers and books could easily have concealed a crouching assassin. When I had taken the necessary photographs, Rousseau examined the floor, taking care not to

step in the blood. A silken valance that touched the floor attracted my attention; the lower edge was flecked with brown smears, although the body lay some distance away, and when I lifted this I perceived that there was a second smaller pool of blood under the bed almost against the wall.

"Whatever his reason," I remarked to Rousseau, "it looks as though the wounded man crawled or dragged himself to that spot. Perhaps he feared a second shot."

Rousseau, who was staring with puckered brows at the murdered man, suddenly stooped and lifted one of the hands; beneath was a sheet of crumpled paper, on which the words, *Gilbert Farquart murdered me. O. Lafargue*, had been traced in blood, evidently with a fingertip.

"Now, Doctor," my colleague cried, placing the paper carefully in my open case, "please examine the body, move it as little as possible, and beware of treading in the bloodstains. We will wait here until you have finished."

For an hour Dr. Artois worked in silence, neglecting no detail, and making copious notes as his scrutiny proceeded. Then he came to us with flushed face and gleaming eyes.

"I will spare you medical terms," he began, "but one thing is certain. That man died instantly! He never knew what had happened! So the tale of his last dying words is not true. As for that scrawl, it lay beneath his right hand, the forefinger is stained, and there is blood under the nail; *yet he was left-handed*, as you can see by the development of the muscles."

"You are quite sure, Doctor?" Rousseau began gravely. "You understand how serious your statement may be for—someone."

"Quite sure. Besides, he fell on his face! There are livid spots on his breast and on his elbows. Such spots appear at the moment the blood ceases to circulate wherever a body presses against a hard surface. Moreover, a man shot from behind, as was Lafargue, would nearly always give at the knees and fall forward. I am of the opinion that he was dragged under the bed for some reason and then pulled out again—you'll find several blue marks of bruises where fingers gripped the legs. He was then turned on his back, and someone, presumably

the murderer, dipped one of the victim's fingers in blood and wrote those accusing words. If you need further proof, you'll notice that one of his elastic sock-suspenders has been dragged from its fastening. Last of all, no man could write on a thin sheet of paper whilst lying on his back and staring up at the ceiling. There is only one thing which puzzles me, and that is the deep gash in the scalp just above the left ear, which, by the appearance, was inflicted after death, as though the murderer had wished to make quite sure of his work."

"I can visualize everything you say except the reason for dragging the dead man under the bed and out again. We'll question the servant now. At any rate, we know he lied. Call him and let's see how he takes it."

For a minute Rousseau stared at the man, who stood before him with averted eyes, evidently uneasy. Suddenly he pointed an accusing hand at him :

"Why did you lie, Batiste? Your master was killed instantly, and could not have spoken after he fell."

At the ominous words, Batiste drew himself up and, with steady voice, replied :

"I did *not* lie, monsieur. Three people heard the shot that killed my master and his scream. Mademoiselle Gauthier, the maid from next door, Monsieur Camille from the bookshop two doors away, and a messenger boy from the post office, who had stopped to give my sweetheart a *pnemuatique* from her brother. All three can prove I was in the street at the time and ran upstairs in alarm."

"How was your master lying?"

"Just as he is now. I lifted his head, and he said faintly, 'Farquart——'"

"Yes, yes," Rousseau interrupted; "but the doctor here declares that he must have lain on his face."

"Monsieur is mistaken: he lay on his back."

"You heard only one shot?"

"Only one."

"Had Baron Lafargue been at home all day?"

"I cannot say, monsieur. I had been sent to the bank after lunch, and also to various shops. When I came in about five

my master was in his dressing-gown. I delivered my messages and gave him the bundle of banknotes——”

“Stop a bit—how much?”

“One hundred thousand francs, all in large notes.”

Rousseau looked at me, as much as to say “There is the motive,” but I shook my head, for it was obvious that, had the man wished to steal the money, he need not have returned.

“Do you know what he did with so large a sum?”

“I saw him place it in the safe in his study; he always keeps his money there. The key is usually on the writing-table. It is a combination lock.”

“If, as you say, your master accused a man named Farquart, how did the fellow enter, and how did he go?”

“I saw no one, but several doors lead into the garden, and the wall is not high.”

We could get nothing further from the man that would throw a light on the mystery. Curiously enough, the other servants had been sent in advance to the baron's villa at St. Raphael because he had intended to spend December and January on the Riviera. This explained the withdrawal of a large sum of money and the many trunks packed with clothes we had seen standing in the hall. No doubt the assassin had chosen this moment because Lafargue was alone in the house. Rousseau immediately questioned the neighbour and the maid, who confirmed what Batiste had stated. The messenger boy was also found, and recalled hearing a detonation and a cry, whereupon Batiste had exclaimed, “My God, something has happened to the *patron*!” and had rushed into the house. A *juge d'instruction* was nominated, and when Rousseau had obtained the necessary warrant two men were sent to find Gilbert Farquart, who was known to us, since he had served a sentence for fraud several years previously. Early the next morning the detectives returned with the astounding news that, at the precise moment when, according to Batiste, the shot was fired, Farquart, who had indeed sworn to kill Lafargue, had been knocked down by a motor-van and taken to hospital with a broken rib. That seemed definitely to dispose of the man whom the dying

financier had accused. Rousseau brought me the news with a rueful face.

"I have wired to the chief," he said. "We always seem to be helpless without him. It's galling to think that he will at once discover the truth, whilst we can only grope blindly in a fog."

I, too, had spent the night cudgelling my brains in vain, but towards morning, tossing in uneasy half-slumber, a strange idea had come to me, and, foolish as it seemed, I wished to test my theory. I said nothing to my colleague, however, but, taking an assistant with me, went once more to the Boulevard Maiesherbes. There I obtained impressions of the dead man's hands, photographed the face from above and in profile, and compiled a chart with the well-known anthropometrical measurements and the potent abbreviations of the verbal portrait. Baron Lafargue was short, squat, and powerfully built. His complexion must have been swarthy, his eyes were dark brown, and his hair black and curly. A long puckered scar crossed diagonally from ear to chin on the left side, as though he had once been slashed with a razor, and on his left forearm was tattooed a complex device in blue and red, which I learned was his coat of arms. It struck me as strange that the hands, although soft and white, revealed several old callosities, which proved that at some period he had known manual labour; his feet too, were partially sunburnt, as though they had been exposed to strong sunshine whilst shod only with sandals; yet for a time the inference to be drawn from these details escaped me.

When the next morning I entered the laboratory, my assistant informed me that Bertillon wished me to come to his office at once.

"You have been to the house where this murder was committed," he said, without waiting for me to return his greeting. "What did you do?"

I laid my chart and photographs on the table, and my chief examined them intently, now and then consulting some notes. At last he looked up with a queer smile:

"The fingerprints are useless, of course, for the murdered man is not in our records. But your description tallies exactly

with those I have obtained from men who knew Baron Lafargue intimately. Your work will not be wasted, however. Now tell me, why did you do this? You had a reason, I suppose?"

"I thought it best to make sure that the murdered man was really the baron," I replied, flushing.

Bertillon nodded. "Yes—I understand. In this case, however, the question of identity does not arise. The servant would have been the first to notice anything strange in his master's appearance. That scrawl, too, has been submitted to Couturier, our handwriting expert, and compared with letters written by Lafargue. He traced those words without a doubt."

"But the doctor is certain that death must have been instantaneous!"

"Therefore the shot that instantly killed him was fired after he accused Farquart. My theory is that the murderer appeared suddenly and struck Lafargue the blow that gashed his scalp. Thereupon the financier shot at his assailant and called for help. Batiste heard the report of the pistol and the cry, ran upstairs, and was immediately ordered to fetch a doctor and the police. When he had gone the wounded man realized that his enemy was still hidden in the room and crawled under the bed, but was dragged out and shot. There was, as we know, no one in the house to hear the second detonation."

"But Farquart was knocked down by a lorry at the time Lafargue was killed," I objected.

"We don't know the precise minute at which the second shot was fired. Farquart may have been running away from the house when he met with the accident. A difference of ten minutes would suffice. However, I wish to examine the room myself, so that the body can be taken to the mortuary for a post-mortem, which will show if he was first felled by a blow. Come along, we'll go there now."

"But, sir," I insisted, "if Lafargue shot to defend himself, where is his weapon?"

"We'll see. It may have been torn from his hand by the murderer and used against him. If so, he may have retained it when he fled."



The room of the tragedy seemed to fascinate my chief. A sheet had been thrown over the body, otherwise all was exactly as it had been on the night I first saw it. Bertillon sat long and thoughtfully in a corner, trying as usual to visualize what had actually happened. At last he rose with a sigh.

"I don't get it, somehow. There are disturbing influences. So many inexplicable contradictions. A man, apparently killed instantly, not only speaks, but writes an accusation with a finger of his right hand, although he is left-handed. No sign of forced entry nor of anyone leaving the house, and no weapon. The safe was opened to-day by the firm who made it; they declare that it had not been tampered with, and yet the money is gone. I've rarely seen a case with so few indications to guide us." Stooping, he drew the sheet from the body and examined it with his lenses.

"Farquart has fair hair, hasn't he?" Bertillon suddenly asked, and I saw he had detached several hairs from a cuff-link.

"Yes," I replied, "I saw his chart. Fair, with blue eyes. His father was English and his mother German."

Bertillon placed the hairs in a box and continued his examination. At last he straightened up and beckoned to the gendarme at the door.

"The body can be removed," he said. "Telephone to Doctor Maupert. I want the bullet as soon as possible. This room must be sealed and guarded still; I may come again."

During the drive to headquarters Bertillon was unusually thoughtful. I was startled therefore when at the door of his office he suddenly clapped me on the shoulder and said genially, "Come now, let's see if my teachings have made any impression. What in this instance would *you* do?"

"Apply the rule of three," I replied without hesitation.

"The rule of three?"

"Yes, so I've dubbed it in my notes. Who profits by the crime; seek the motive for the deed in the past of victim and suspect; and seek the woman."

Bertillon grinned boyishly. "Excellent—the rule of three! I'd not thought of that, but it's apt—very apt. Unfortunately there seems to be no woman this time, and that handicaps us.

Well, sooner or later you must stand on your own legs. Take charge if you like, and come to me if you are puzzled."

"May I have Rousseau with me?" I asked, delighted with the opportunity.

"The old Brigadier? Certainly. You'd better report to me the moment you have any clue; I'll give you Doctor Maupert's report and the fatal bullet to-morrow."

And with a wave of his hand my chief dismissed me. At the door I ran into Colbert of the Ninth Mobile Brigade, who held a sheaf of documents and appeared unusually elated.

"That financier Lafargue was a crook," he said. "His death saved him from ten years in Cayenne. Complaints have come in from firms all over France. The fellow was the pivot of a gigantic fraud, and got hold of six or seven million francs."

"Come to my room, Colbert," I said with studied unconcern. "I must know about this: I'm in charge of the investigation."

"*Non!*" my friend exclaimed incredulously. "You—on your own? H—m, the chief hasn't given you a simple case for your debut. Naturally I'm with you. Come on!"

"It would seem, then," I said, when I had studied the detailed record Colbert had brought, "that Farquart and the dead man have been lifelong enemies. Their rivalry dates from the time they were at college together. Farquart was the show boy and Lafargue the dunce."

"Yes. I interviewed the former principal of the school. Farquart excelled in work and sport, whilst the other was dull and vicious. He was nearly expelled for some sordid intrigue when only seventeen. Then at twenty-five, whilst studying at the Sorbonne, Lafargue fell in love with a girl-student and proposed, but Farquart, brilliant, fascinating, and full of sparkling fun, also courted the girl, swept her off her feet, and married her. There is a blank of ten years in the dossier, during which it seems Farquart slowly degenerated, whilst the dull pupil became a power in finance. Then, quite unexpectedly, Farquart became involved in a swindle and was sent to prison. Whilst serving his sentence his only son died, and when he was finally released his wife had vanished. No trace of her has been found. I have

an idea Lafargue had something to do with her disappearance. He certainly bribed some crooks to get Farquart put away. It was a nasty business. I think if you could get hold of the chief witness against him at the trial, a man named Jean Leboiteux, better known as Chichi, you'd learn something. Anyway, Farquart discovered his old rival engineered his arrest, and vowed to kill him. Louvois, the safe-breaker, was at Fresnes prison whilst Farquart was there, and reported to us the blood-curdling threats the man uttered."

I nodded understandingly. "Then Lafargue must have known of the threats also, and even if this man, who seems to have been his enemy all through life, didn't kill him, he would naturally think it was Farquart. It is probable he never saw his assailant clearly. I'll go with Rousseau to La Villette to-night in search of this Chichi. It strikes me as likely from what you say that Lafargue led a double life: a man of the world by day, and at night consorting with crooks."

The old Brigadier was much too kindly to feel envious at my abrupt promotion, and was only too pleased to accompany me in my quest, for in some of the evil haunts we entered our lives would not have been worth the proverbial cent had we been recognized.

In order to allay suspicion I had taken an automatic pistol with me and pretended to offer it for sale. It was long past midnight when, at the Café des Amis, a thin, hawk-faced creature sidled up to us and said:

"I'll buy the thing if it's clean."

"I can't guarantee that," I replied with a leer. "But it's not being sought. I didn't want to throw it away, because I'm short of cash; however, if I can't sell it, I'll take a walk near the Seine and drop it in the water. By the way, I hear there's been a shooting in the Boulevard Malesherbes."

At my words the fellow stared intently.

"You had no hand in that. It was Farquart. I was at Fresnes with him. Louvois framed him and told him why. He'd been paid by Lafargue to fix it."

"What kind of man was Lafargue," I asked carelessly — "*un frangin*?" (a pal).

"Sure—and a good 'un. Free with his money. Mean to say you've never seen him? Dark like a Spaniard, he was, with a little pointed beard."

"Oh aye," Rousseau broke in. "I cashed some sparklers for him once."

Our new acquaintance shook his head, "No, that one didn't work sparklers. He only ran the high confidence game. Shares and bogus companies. But something went wrong suddenly; his *môme* [sweetheart], La Grande Lison, has been left without a sou. Well, give me the gun; here is a louis—is that enough?"

I handed over the weapon, one of the many confiscated by the police, and, after paying for drinks out of the gold piece, withdrew. Rousseau seized my arm when we reached the street.

"Leave it to me," he said, "to find that girl; she'll be a mine of information. I'll come to your laboratory as soon as I've news."

The next morning when I arrived at headquarters I found a nickel-jacketed .38 calibre pistol-ball on my table. I was struck at once by a queer bright circle on the stub, such as I had never seen before. It had not been produced by the rifling, for it completely encircled the edge. Which ever way I turned, the case seemed to grow more mysterious. Had the bullet been fired from a special weapon, a walking-stick gun for instance? It seemed possible, and I at once sent two detectives to enquire who lived opposite the house of the tragedy. But there again the thread snapped. The only windows from which Lafargue's bedroom could be seen were those of a well-known English bank. After lunch I interviewed Gilbert Farquart, who was in the police infirmary, the *juge d'instruction* having decided to detain him pending our investigation. My first impression was not favourable.

Farquart was a powerful fellow with curly golden hair and heavy drooping moustache. His eyes glinted coldly green with the sheen of glacier ice; the lips were thin and sardonic; and the nose recalled a bird of prey. Altogether he was that type whom one would not care to meet in a deserted

spot. The moment he spoke however, the impression his features created vanished utterly. The voice was strong and pleasant, and its hypnotic quality attracted me strangely. Farquart admitted quite frankly that he had determined to rid the world of a noxious beast, but that someone else had forestalled him.

"I fancy the someone, whoever he may be, wished to implicate me," he said with a sad smile, "because on the day of the crime I received a telegram signed 'Louvois', informing me that if I wished to catch Lafargue with all his stolen money on him I must go to the Boulevard Malesherbes at six-thirty. It suited me, instead of shooting the creature, to land him in jail, so I went; but, as you know, I was knocked down at the St. Augustin cross-roads."

"You have that telegram?" I asked.

Farquart made a wry face, "No—one doesn't keep such messages. I destroyed it."

"Where was it delivered, and at what time?"

"Oh, I hadn't thought of that. Of course, you can trace a wire. It was sent to the Hotel Alcazar in the Boule 'Mich'. I received it at half-past eleven."

"You have a pistol?"

"Yes, at the hotel, in my trunk; here are the keys."

"Well, presuming you didn't kill Lafargue, who do you think did?"

"*Quien sabe?* One of the many crooks he frequented. They must have known his yacht was ready to steam."

"That's news to us. He had a yacht?"

"Yes, the *Dame de Pique*. She lies at Toulon. One of my agents is there watching."

I much desired to question Farquart about his missing wife, but something in his face warned me not to broach that subject. I left him therefore with the assurance that the truth would soon be known. It was queer; I couldn't for the life of me think of Farquart as a murderer, yet the pistol I found in his room was another link in the chain against him. It was a .38 calibre Browning, and smelled of recent firing. That evening at seven I went to Lafargue's house again and,

placing one of my men at the gate where the servant said he had stood, entered the bedroom and fired a shot at the ceiling.

Although the detonation was terrific in that confined space, the waiting detective heard nothing. The windows were double and hung with heavy curtains, and I realized at once that one of them must have been open when the crime was committed—but why? Surely the murderer would use every means to prevent passers-by from becoming alarmed? I was still moodily staring at the spot where my shot had knocked a flake of plaster from the ceiling, when I noticed a similar flake on the carpet near the bed.

Hastily making a pyramid of a table and two chairs, I climbed up and examined the frieze. It was of hard cement, and lodged at the back was a pistol-ball, which I was able to dislodge with my knife. Then I did the same for the shot I had just fired. Superficially the two bullets were alike, and no sign of the bright circle on the edge was to be seen. Suddenly the reason dawned on me, sending a shiver of excitement along my spine. At last I began to have an inkling of the truth. Again I examined and measured the rusty brown stains on the carpet and under the bed, and with my new knowledge scrutinized the heavy brass frame. Several black hairs adhered to one side in a gout of blood. Unquestionably the murdered man had struck his head there as he fell.

That disposed of my chief's theory that the assailant had stunned him first. Thereupon I also examined the window and curtains. The fringe on the right was slightly tinged with red, and so was the bolt of the window behind it. Fortunately I had several test-tubes with me, and at once scraped particles of the blood from the various spots for microscope tests. I was still engrossed in this work when Rousseau, disguised as a villainous loafer, came silently into the darkened laboratory.

"We go to the 'Poule qui Pond' to-night," he said. "It is a *bal musette* in the Rue Charenton. La Grande Lison is usually there after twelve."

"All right," I said. "Let's have dinner here together. I'll send a gendarme to Rougier's restaurant for food. I want to talk to you, and I'm expecting the copy of a telegram any moment."

Ten minutes later the policeman came back with a basket containing several dishes and a bottle of wine, and we at once began our meal. Rousseau looked quizzically at the Burgundy I had ordered.

"*Mazette*, you must have good news! Volnay 1904, that's a good year."

"I knew your weakness, old friend," I said with a laugh. "By the way, here is the bullet that killed Lafargue. What should you say produced that shining circle?"

"I don't think I've ever seen the like. Do you know?"

"I believe I do. Come into the camera room and I'll show you. We'll shoot the lay-figure once more." So saying, I adjusted a pistol and fired. There was a plop like a bottle of wine being uncorked, and the figure we used for experiments twisted sideways. Rousseau went to the mattress at the back and picked out the bullet. Then he looked at the heavy tube on my automatic.

"A silencer, by God!" he gasped. "And it's produced similar marks too. Was the fellow killed by such a trick, then? But no—that's impossible. Four people heard the detonation."

"Yes, they were meant to hear it. The murderer opened the window intentionally. He must have known that otherwise the sound would not carry as far as the street. That proves he had tried it before."

Rousseau whistled. "I don't see what you are driving at, but you seem to have a theory."

"I have, but I must be sure before I explain."

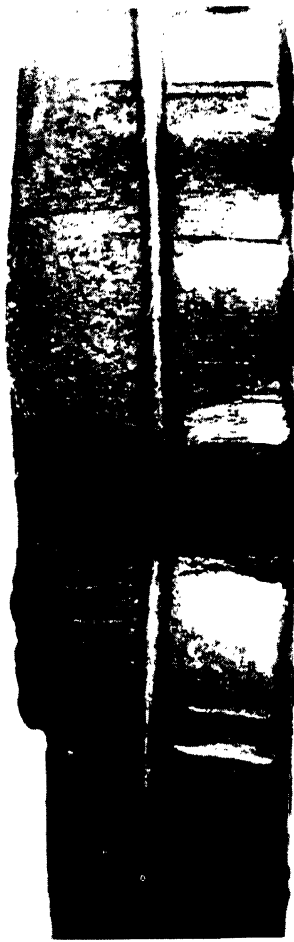
At that moment the bell shrilled and an assistant brought me a copy of the telegram.

*"Octave preparing to seek better climate. Go to his house at seven; he will have the goods. Louvois,"* I read aloud.

"So Farquart did not lie. Who handed this in?" I added, turning to the officer. "Did the employee notice?"

"Yes, he said a boy brought it."

"Naturally—our men wouldn't risk going in person. Well, we must try to find the boy. Now, Rousseau, give me ten minutes to dress and I'll be with you."

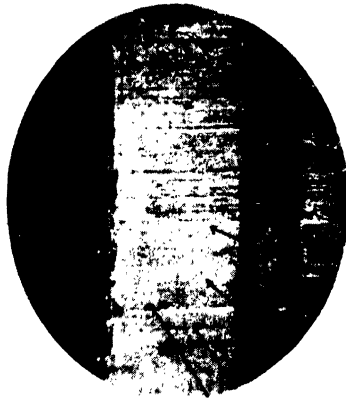


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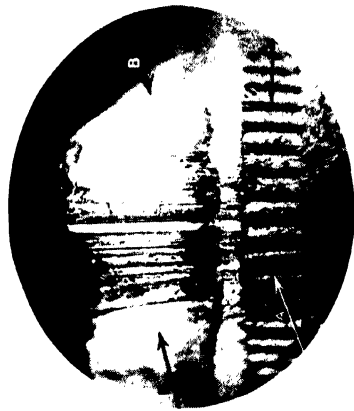


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5

1. THE BULLET FROM THE CORNICE

2. THE SAME BULLET FROM THE SILENCER-PISTOL FLATTENED OUT

3. THE PECULIAR SHINING RIM ON THE STUB OF THE BULLET PRODUCED BY THE SILENCER

4. FIRED WITHOUT THE SILENCER

5. MICROPHOTOGRAPH OF THE BULLET SHOWING RIFLING LINES (A,A) AND THE QUEER SHINING CIRCLE MADE BY THE SILENCER (B,B)





An hour later, arrayed in the cheap flashy clothes apaches favour when bent on amusement, I sat beside my friend in the smoky ill-lit dance-hall, where a dozen men and girls were solemnly gyrating to the music of an accordion and a drum.

"That's Lison," Rousseau whispered suddenly, pointing his cigarette at a tall and exceptionally handsome woman who was leaning against the bar. I remembered the part I had to play, and at once invited her to dance. My crude flattery seemed to please her, and when I carelessly displayed a wad of notes, with a coarse jest about their doubtful origin, she became visibly interested. Our flirtation developed to friendly drinks and an invitation to supper at the Bastille. Rousseau, whom I introduced as my mate, had been well primed, and vetoed my suggestion with a furious curse.

"Anxious to feel the bracelets on your wrists, eh?" he growled. "Be careful or I'll turn you cold [knife you]. Keep that cash out of sight. That's how you all get pinched. We'll go to Jules Boni's place. The food's good and the '*flics*' (police) don't push their long noses in at the door."

The place he had named was a true thieves' den, and it allayed any suspicion the girl may have harboured. True to her training, she asked no questions, but as the heady wine with which I plied her took effect, she became loquacious. After a time I led the talk to Lafargue, pretending he had failed to pay me for my assistance in staging a swindle.

"Ah, that one!" she at once shrilled angrily. "You are not the only pal he tricked. As you see me, I was his friend. Money, jewels, everything he gave me, are on his boat. I was to have gone with him to Greece. I'd like to meet the pig that shot him."

"So would I. Have you any idea who it was?"

"Yes, Giacomo Donati. They were always together this last two weeks."

"Giacomo," I said. "Why, that's the tall, fair-haired Italian who slipped through at the assizes in Milan."

"No—you are wrong; Giacomo came from Naples. A little swarthy clean-shaven beast. He's vanished since the night Octave was killed. I've looked everywhere for him."

I had much ado to keep from rushing out there and then, for this was news indeed, but I had the sense to play my game to the end and to keep the girl in a good humour. Thus I learned that Lafargue had indeed lived a double life. In the underworld of crime he wore a beard and rough clothes, and no one had known who he was, until the girl had discovered his true identity by following him home one morning, although she averred she had kept the knowledge to herself.

The next day, trembling with excitement, I sent a long wire to the police at Naples, and their reply was the last link in my chain.

When I sought Bertillon in his office with the report I had spent the night in preparing, he looked at me with twinkling eyes.

"So soon?" he exclaimed. "That's good. Let's see if we have arrived at the same result. I'll write the name of the murderer on a slip of paper. Now fire away. First the result, and then your work in detail. Wait, I'll send for Rousseau; he must be present."

A moment later my friend arrived and at a sign took a seat.

I had come with a carefully prepared speech, but Bertillon's clear gaze disconcerted me; I could only blurt out:

"*Lafargue is not dead!* The man found in his bedroom, who resembled him like his twin brother, is Giacomo Donati. Lafargue killed him in order to get safely away and to stop all search for the stolen money."

Bertillon had started to his feet at this abrupt announcement, and now stood staring with dilated eyes.

"You are mad," he muttered after a long silence. "The dead man is unquestionably the swindling financier, and he was killed by Louvois at the instigation of Farquart, or so at least I think. Anyhow, tell me your reason for this extraordinary theory."

"It is no theory, monsieur," I replied, nettled. "I sent a verbal portrait and the formula of his fingerprints to the Sûreté at Naples. Their reply arrived last night: "*Description fits Giacomo Donati, except for scar and tattooing. Fingerprint formula exact.*"

I then related my various experiments in detail. "So you see,

sir," I concluded, "the points that roused my suspicions were : the fatal shot was fired with a silencer on the barrel ; a second shot meant to attract attention was fired at the ceiling with the window open. The man died instantly, and could neither have spoken nor written the message accusing Farquart. He was left-handed, whilst Lafargue was not, and the safe was opened by someone who knew the combination before the murder was committed, for there is no blood on key or safe. The servants were sent away by Lafargue, who, although he already had a valet, engaged Batiste merely because the man had been in prison and would therefore be terrified at becoming involved in a murder. All that seemed to point to a cunning scheme evolved by Lafargue.

"Above all, why the silencer and the second shot? Moreover, a dying man would not send his servant to fetch a doctor living several miles away when there are several quite near. So this is how I figure it out. Psychology teaches us that there is no hate like that of a coward for the man he has wronged, and Lafargue had sent Farquart to prison and, when the baby died, abducted the wife. I had that from a sailor he discharged not long ago. Lafargue was on the eve of being arrested for fraud ; he had to get away with a large sum of money and had to prevent Farquart from following him. By chance, or because he had long sought such a man, he met Giacomo, an escaped convict who resembled him in strange fashion. ■

"My photographs prove that the scar and the tattoo marks are recent, therefore Lafargue must have bribed Giacomo to take his place. Part of the bargain was that the Neopolitan had to submit to the slash on his cheek and the tattooing. I learned from Lison that Giacomo's face was bandaged for more than a week. Lafargue always wore a false beard when he visited the apache taverns at night, so his own scar was hidden. The captain of the *Dame de Pique* had been ordered to prepare for a voyage. That was done to tempt Giacomo, who had probably been offered the use of the yacht if flight became urgent. No doubt the arch-plotter invented a plausible tale.

"He then decoyed the Italian to his rooms whilst Batiste was away, showed him the wad of banknotes the servant brought at five o'clock, and, when Giacomo had dressed in his clothes, shot him from behind with the silencer on the barrel. Thereupon, with incredible audacity, Lafargue wrote the accusing message with the dead man's finger, pushed the body under the bed, smeared himself with blood, opened the window, fired a shot at the ceiling without the silencer, and flung himself on the ground. Probably he had first made sure that only Batiste had entered the house. When the terrified servant came he gasped out the accusation against Farquart and sent him for the doctor.

"The moment the servant had vanished he shut the window, drew the curtains, pulled the body into the middle of the room again, placed those hairs you found where he knew they would be seen, and fled. I think he also dispatched the decoy telegram to Farquart so as to make sure the man would be seen in the vicinity, and, but for that very fortunate accident, we should have been convinced Farquart was the assassin. Lafargue made two mistakes : The fact that the murderer knew a pistol-shot could not be heard with the windows shut revealed too intimate a knowledge of the premises, and he should have shot Donati in such fashion that he *might* have regained consciousness for a few minutes." I stopped breathlessly, for Bertillon had stretched out his hand and gripped mine. It was my reward !

"Now, my omniscient pupil, perhaps you will tell me where we can find Lafargue ?"

"I first applied rule one and two," I replied. "Who benefits by the crime, and seek the motive in the past activities of victim and criminal. Rule three is 'Seek the woman', in this case Farquart's wife. Lafargue is madly in love with her, and will certainly rejoin her."

Before I could say more the telephone rang loudly, Bertillon listened with a queer expression for several minutes. then he slammed down the receiver. "That was Monsieur Dufresne. Farquart's wife has just arrived in Paris. She has been a prisoner on a little island in the Ægean sea ; Stenosa,



OUR TWO ITALIAN DETECTIVES MASQUERADING AS  
WANDERING BOHEMIANS WHILST WATCHING FOR  
LAFARGUE'S ARRIVAL



A PHOTOGRAPH OF LAFARGUE IN THE DOCK, TAKEN BY  
A PRESS PHOTOGRAPHER. THE SCAR WHICH HE CON-  
CEALED UNDER A FALSE BEARD IS CLEARLY VISIBLE



she called it. A week ago she managed to escape. She is now with her husband."

"Then we must charter a gunboat or a revenue cutter from Italy. Be sure Lafargue is on his way there. He chose Greece as a retreat because there is no extradition. I'll see Farquart; his wife must come back with us as decoy in order to get him on board a ship under the French flag."

"Very well, I'll give you full powers and a warrant. I'll also telegraph to all frontiers and seaports."

"And I'll come with you!" Rousseau cried excitedly, "if the chief permits!"

"Certainly," Bertillon agreed, reaching for the telephone. "Get off at once; there is no time to be lost."

At the door I turned and asked, "How about Farquart, sir? I shall have to explain. Can I tell him he will soon be free?"

"Unofficially, yes. The *juge d'instruction* shall have your report to-day. No doubt he will have him removed to a hospital pending his recovery."

When I arrived at the prison infirmary I found Farquart talking earnestly to a beautiful dark-eyed woman. He stretched out his hand to me with a smile:

"Thanks," he said. "I believe I owe this favour to you. The doctor just came with my wife and told me that the Sûreté had telephoned their permission."

"I am afraid you must prepare for another separation," I replied cheerfully. "Madame must help us to trap Lafargue."

Both stared at me wild-eyed, and I enjoyed their amazement for a full minute. At last Farquart almost screamed, "Tell me, for God's sake, isn't he dead?" and when I had related what I knew, he only muttered, "The cunning, cunning beast. Surely the law will hold me blameless if I kill him?"

"Why risk it? If your wife, who has no cause to love him, will act as decoy, he'll go to the guillotine. I'll promise you shall be present at the execution if it strains all my credit. What is your answer, madame?"

"Can you ask?" the woman replied in a deep thrilling contralto. "He drugged me, abducted me—and—compelled me to become . . ." She pressed her hands to her face and I



understood what it was she could not say. "I was a prisoner all this time, tended by two brutish Neapolitan peasants. They must have learned something had happened to upset their master's plans, for one morning I found the door open and my clothes and some money on my bed."

Thereupon I gave Madame Farquart minute instructions, which her husband endorsed, and two hours later we had started on our long journey to Brindisi. I had arranged for an Italian boat to take us to the Piræus, where I was able to charter a speedy yacht from a French firm of exporters. A cable from Bertillon informed me that as yet no trace of Lafargue had been found, and I realized fully the leap in the dark we had taken. No one, it seemed, had come to the little island, which was only sparsely inhabited by wine-growers and shepherds. I had learned from the Greek authorities that Lafargue had bought a stretch of land and a large spacious house there which had once belonged to a German prince. Our arrival was unexpected, and the Neapolitans who guarded the place were taken by surprise. We had two Italian detectives with us, and when Lafargue's creatures had been conducted to my yacht and locked in a cabin, these two dressed as wandering Bohemian peasants and settled down to watch, ready to help if necessary. My part was the rôle of a wealthy German travelling for pleasure, and Rousseau became my steward. Madame Lafargue again took up her abode in the house, whilst we continued to cruise idly in a circle about our island trap. Several anxious days passed, and already I feared my psychology had overshot the mark, when late one evening a trim launch, flying the Greek flag, was seen approaching the tiny harbour.

"That's bad," Rousseau said. "If that boat stays we shall get into trouble; we have no right to arrest a man in these waters."

"We are not going to arrest him. Once he is on our yacht, which is French, so long as he came voluntarily, we are entitled to keep him on board and to take him to France." Rousseau grinned at the word "voluntarily", and said nothing more. We had run the yacht behind a headland, well out of sight, and

landed in time to conceal ourselves under some trees. The launch had dropped her anchor in the bay, and a rowing-boat was coming to shore. I made out an elderly bearded man dressed in white through my binoculars, who came ashore by himself; whereupon the boat at once pulled away. The house was a good hour's walk inland, so that we were able to steam into the harbour and make fast by the little landing-stage before he could arrive there.

A ruddy twilight was flaming in the west when at last I heard a woman screaming and saw Madame Farquart, with torn clothes and dishevelled hair, running swiftly down the path from the village. Some hundred paces behind pounded the bearded man I had seen in the boat. The scene had been well rehearsed, and when he came stumbling on board, he found me sitting at a table on deck and before me the woman, wringing her hands and pouring out a broken incoherent story.

Lafargue, for there was no doubt of his identity, although his disguise was excellent, at once dashed forward and, seizing her by an arm cried, "She is my wife, monsieur. She suffers from delusions, and I am compelled to keep her locked in the house."

"He lies—he lies—I am not his wife!"

I looked gravely from one to the other, and then at the crew, who had drawn near and were listening intently. As though this had decided me, I bowed with much ceremony and, pointing to the companionway, said in vilely accented French:

"We must discuss this below, mein Herr. If the lady is your wife, she shall return with you."

My speech and appearance reassured the rogue. I allowed him to drag the unresisting woman with him and followed leisurely. As soon as they were in the cabin Madame Farquart poured out an endless story of wrongs, as prearranged, in a loud voice. Rousseau, I knew, stood on guard outside the door: his appearance was to inform me that the Neapolitans had been placed in charge of the two detectives and that all was ready for our voyage. He knocked a moment later to enquire at what time I desired to dine. I was about to reply, when

Lafargue suddenly clutched at my arm ; he had felt the vibration of the propeller.

"What is this ?" he cried. "Your ship is moving !"

I saw his hand glide to a pocket as I rose to my feet and instantly covered him with my own weapon.

"Sit down, my friend," I said quietly, and he jumped at my changed manner and accent. "If you move or make a noise we'll clap you in irons."

"You daren't," he yelled, "you dirty *mouchard*. These are Greek waters!" and he ran to the open porthole. But before he could signal to the launch, which I saw lay just to port, Rousseau and I were on him. I clapped my hand to his mouth whilst my friend pulled at his legs, and we came to the ground in a struggling heap. It was my turn to yell now, for the rogue had fastened his teeth in my hand, and his strength was terrific. Rousseau saw my plight and seized Lafargue by the throat, forcing him to open his straining jaws, and at once stuffed a handkerchief down his throat. Then we lay still, content to hold our prisoner until the yacht, which was gaining speed every minute, was well out of earshot of the launch.

"Now shout and be damned to you, Octave Lafargue, murderer and thief," I cried savagely. "You are on a French ship flying the tricolour, and soon you'll be safely lodged at the Paris Santé."

We had no further trouble, keeping away from all vessels, and reached Marseilles without incident.

Lafargue was sentenced to lifelong imprisonment at Cayenne, but three years later he was shot by a warder whilst trying to escape. The stolen money, which was on the launch, was transferred to France after the usual formalities by the Greek authorities.

I still have the scar on my hand where the brute bit me, and also the handsome cigarette-case which Farquart and his wife gave me in memory of the service I had rendered them.

**EPISODE IV**  
**THE MYSTERY OF THE DYING MEN**



## THE MYSTERY OF THE DYING MEN

HOWEVER cunning and subtle a criminal may be—and Jules Lebel, known as the Ghoul, was a master of guile—he cannot foresee the uncanny pranks the Imp of the Perverse may play, which will bring the cleverest schemes to naught. Blind Chance, Coincidence, Fate, they are merely so many names for this mocking sprite, who always pounces gleefully on the one flaw in the web the malefactor has woven, and, grasping it in his seemingly puny hands, rends the entire fabric to shreds. Scientific investigation has indeed armed the law with powerful weapons, but the greatest ally, even of the scientific detective, must ever be, Chance! Never did this appear in more striking fashion than in the case of the dying men, where everything had been foreseen except the unexpected change of heart of an irascible Canadian rancher, who at the last bequeathed a fortune on his nephew James Gillespie, one of the ghoul's victims, thus causing the police to search for a man of whom otherwise they would never have heard.

“It is a curious thing, a terrifying fact even,” Bertillon remarked unexpectedly, looking up from some photographs I had placed on his table, “that every year hundreds of men and women disappear for some unknown reason without leaving any trace. Not always as the result of a crime, of course. Some abruptly leave their families—change their names—settle in another land because of an intrigue; others vanish because they fear the police; but many, I believe, are the victims of plots which we are never called upon to investigate. When I tried to identify that unfortunate woman who was murdered last week—I requested Dufresne to give me a list of the women who had lately disappeared. The result was

appalling! In Paris alone no less than twenty-seven girls had vanished within one month. God knows what has become of them."

"You have a reason for saying this?" I queried, scenting a mystery.

"Naturally! Here is a letter from an old lady, Madame Duvernier, living at Suresnes, who writes to ask me if I cannot trace her son. It appears he was very ill—tuberculosis in an advanced state. He had been working in a chemical factory at Dijon, but had been compelled to take to his bed some months ago. She begged of him to return home so that she might nurse him, and he had agreed to this. But instead of coming, he sent a letter containing a cheque for a large sum of money. In the letter he stated that a good friend was taking him to Egypt in the hope of effecting a cure; she was not to worry if she received no news for a time. A second missive arrived from Algiers, cheery and hopeful—and since then—silence. Receiving no reply to her urgent letters, the old lady took train to Marseilles and crossed to Algiers, expecting to find her son there, but no one could tell her anything—in fact no one had any knowledge of the young man. The local police looked wise, but did little, and finally, almost heart-broken, she wrote to me.

"I am doing what I can—but—I have a feeling that it would be better she should never learn the truth. The money she received was probably stolen. I have nevertheless instructed Colbert to investigate. As always, these cases come in series. Dufresne has just telephoned requesting me to grant an interview to Mademoiselle Jacqueline Delorme, whose father, a captain in the merchant service, is an old friend. It appears she wishes to consult me about a missing sweetheart. And then, to crown it all, our esteemed American colleague Meester Bannister——"

"What, Jim Bannister?" I exclaimed involuntarily.

Bertillon smiled indulgently. "Yes, the so clever and courageous James Bannister whom we all esteem—is coming to-day. He has only just landed from the *France*. Another mysterious disappearance. Here is his wire:

*"Can you trace James Gillespie, 42, Rue Desresnaudes, commercial traveller, left his lodgings in dying condition evening tenth September whereabouts unknown, heir to fortune, expect me afternoon."*

"It sounds like that amusing game 'Find the missing traveller'. I have been talking to Dufresne. Gillespie is the fifth man this year who suddenly dressed, packed, and vanished after the doctors had pronounced his case as hopeless.

"Not one of them was insured, all were desperately poor, and certainly not worth robbing and murdering. I have some hopes, though. A woman has come on the scene—Mademoiselle Delorme," and Bertillon smiled sardonically. "I do believe women were specially created by Providence to checkmate criminals. A crime without the eternal feminine would probably remain unpunished, but if there is a woman in it, then we may safely count on a successful issue. No, do not go"—as the tiny lamp on the wall flashed the signal that a visitor was on his way; "it is probably the young lady Dufresne wishes me to see. I may need you."

I gathered up my photographs as the door opened, but instead of a girl a tall sunburnt man with black beard and drooping moustache entered hastily.

Bertillon stared a second, then with a chuckle he pointed to a comfortable chair.

"Pray be seated, Monsieur Bannister. That fur on your face must be very hot—you may take it off."

"Sure," a well-remembered voice drawled, and the sweep of a muscular hand removed the ridiculous disguise.

"You are incorrigible, Bannister," I exclaimed, laughing. "What need is there for you to stalk in here like a stage villain? You forget that we have your formula: forehead cleft—nose arched—ears large, with broad fleshy lobes——"

"You needn't go on," my friend interrupted ruefully, tugging at one of the telltale ears. "I had no chance to remove my make-up, because I believe an American crook I am after followed me."



"I thought you were looking for a man named Gillespie," Bertillon asked.

"I am, but I have many irons in the fire. Gillespie comes first, however. Here are several advertisements I have been inserting in the papers all over Europe and in the States, informing Gillespie that a fortune is waiting for him at the death of McGowan, his uncle. I believe the fellow would have replied were he alive. Old man McGowan's ranch is worth a quarter of a million dollars at least. Either Gillespie has been murdered or he is a prisoner, in the power of criminals. That is why——"

Before Bannister could complete the sentence the signal again flashed a warning, and a moment later the door opened to admit a surprisingly pretty girl. She halted, embarrassed at seeing several strangers, but Bertillon quickly reassured her.

"My name is Jacqueline Delorme," the girl said in a timid voice. "My father's friend, Monsieur Dufresne, said you could help me to clear up the mystery of my fiancé's strange conduct."

"At least I shall be happy to try," my chief replied gently. "What is the young man's name?"

"He is not exactly a young man ; James Gillespie was—is, I mean—over forty, but I love him dearly despite the difference in our ages, and, had he not been so ill, we should have married a year ago."

Something in our studiously wooden expressions swiftly carried a message to the girl's sensitive nerves.

She looked at each of us in turn, the colour slowly faded from her cheeks, and, suddenly seizing Bertillon's hand with an appealing gesture, she cried :

"You were speaking of him—I can feel it. You have read the advertisements. Do you also think James Gillespie is dead?"

"We know nothing, mademoiselle," Bertillon replied gravely. "But it is true his name had been mentioned, and the coincidence startled us. Please tell me why you have come here. Omit no detail, however trivial it may seem."

"I first met James Gillespie at a dance," the girl began with an effort. "We fell in love with each other—although he

told me frankly that he had married when he was twenty, and that his wife had died soon after. It was this marriage which led to a quarrel with his uncle in Canada. My fiancé's true name is McGowan, but his father assumed the name of Gillespie—it was, I think, his wife's maiden name—when he came to France. When the father died, his brother, Patrick McGowan, who owns several farms in Canada, adopted James and, I believe, became very fond of him. But, as I said, they quarrelled, and the nephew resigned his post as the old man's manager and settled in Paris. He has a daughter, Mary, a sweet girl. At first Monsieur Gillespie was very successful in his undertakings, but a year ago a financial swindle swallowed most of his savings, and as a consequence he became very ill. Although I loved him as much as ever, my father insisted on a medical examination, and thereupon made me promise not to see my fiancé again until he was better."

"What did he say was the matter with Monsieur Gillespie?"

"Cancer, I believe, of a very serious kind," Mlle. Delorme replied with a quaver in her voice. "But James was optimistic, and met me several times by appointment. There were moments, however, when he was obsessed by the thought that he might die and leave his daughter without money. I tried to reason with him, to cheer him up. He had promised me to consult a specialist; and then, quite unexpectedly, when I called at his rooms, the landlady informed me that he had paid his bills, packed all his belongings, and had gone, although when he said good-bye he was so weak he could hardly stand.

"A week later I received a letter from him telling me not to worry. A friend had given him the means to try a new treatment which he believed would cure him. To my surprise I discovered that his daughter had been sent to an expensive convent-school, where she was to remain until he returned. It is now six months since he left Paris, and, except for that letter, I have had no news. When, some weeks ago, I saw an advertisement in the papers, I advised Mary to write immediately to the lawyers whose address was given. They replied that Patrick McGowan was very ill and wished to be reconciled

with his nephew, who, it appears, is his only living relative. Mary had received two letters from her father which had been posted in Nice, and after discussing the matter we decided to try to find him.

"One of the letters mentioned the Hotel des Alpes, but upon enquiry we learned he had only stayed there a few days. So we went to the police, who informed us that a Monsieur Gillespie was living at the Villa Algérienne on the Corniche road. Mary and I called there at once. A woman dressed as a nurse spoke to us from a window, and when we gave our names she said her patient could see no one. I thereupon wrote, enclosing the advertisements and the reply from the lawyers. Somehow the whole business struck me as queer, so I watched the house for several days from a convenient café. At last one morning a man muffled in a thick coat who resembled James came out of the house. He caught sight of me as I ran across the street, and at once jumped into a waiting car and drove away.

"I hailed a cab and followed, but was soon outdistanced. Seriously alarmed, Mary and I thereupon questioned the neighbours, but learned very little. It seems the man living at the villa was almost a stranger to them, and rarely showed himself, but they had not heard that he was ill. I went to the Villa Algérienne again the next day and found it shut and untenanted, and so it has remained ever since. I fear my fiancé has been murdered, and Mary thinks so too. She and her father had formerly been almost inseparable. It is incredible that he would have fled from her, even if he wished to avoid me."

"You say you enclosed the lawyer's reply and the advertisements with your own letter. It may be therefore that Monsieur Gillespie determined to travel immediately to Canada in order to comply with his uncle's wishes."

Bannister, who had listened attentively to the girl's story, now interposed :

"No, Monsieur Bertillon. I am constantly in touch with Messrs. Harding. They have not heard from Gillespie. Moreover, Patrick McGowan died a week ago."

Mlle. Delorme had started violently at Bannister's interruption.

"Ah—you too, monsieur, are searching for my fiancé?"

"Yes, I have been instructed by my New York office to find out what has become of him. I caused those advertisements to be inserted in the papers."

For a time Bertillon sat drumming his fingers thoughtfully on the table. "You mentioned, I think, that James Gillespie was poor. Who has been paying for his daughter's education at the convent-school, then?"

"That's just it," Mlle. Delorme exclaimed. "In the letter Mary received was a banker's order and a card with the name and address of a notary who, her father informed her, had instructions to pay for everything. We went to this notary in the hope that he would give us definite news of James. But, beyond the fact that he has been entrusted with a large sum of money for Mary which she will receive when she comes of age, and that meanwhile the interest will suffice to pay for her education, he could tell us nothing."

"H'm, it is a strange story, mademoiselle. You must give me time to investigate. I do not think, however, that your fiancé has been murdered. Monsieur Dufresne knows where to find you, *hein*? Then wait until you hear from me. By the way—let me have the name of that notary and the address of the school."

When the girl had gone, Bertillon looked at Bannister with a grim expression. "It is evident this Gillespie is playing a deep game," he said; "he has done something of which he is ashamed, in order to get money."

"But why should he avoid his former sweetheart, and above all his daughter?"

"Probably because he feared to compromise them. It looks as though your man is hiding from the police. Did the uncle make a will?"

"Oh yes—his fortune goes to his nephew, and I still believe the poor devil is in the hands of crooks who are after this money."

"Well, Rousseau shall go to the fellow's former lodgings, and

I will request my colleague in Nice to find out what he can about the people who lived in the Villa Algérienne. . . . By Jove—that's queer ! Algiers is where the old lady went who wrote to me. Her son was also desperately ill, and very poor. He, too, unexpectedly sent her money and then suddenly vanished. I must find out about those other four men Dufresne mentioned. I wonder whether there is any connection ? Come back to-morrow, my friend ; perhaps I may have news."

"Do you mind if we go with Rousseau to have a look at the place where Gillespie lived ?" Bannister asked, picking up his hat.

"By all means. You'll find the old Brigadier at work in the fingerprint department."

When I had explained matters to Rousseau we hailed a taxi and drove to the Rue Desresnaudes, where the mysterious Gillespie had occupied furnished lodgings for three years. The landlady was a kindly old soul, and willing to talk. Her description of her tenant was startling. Not only had the man been very poor but at the last he had been unable to leave his bed and could take no solid food. Doctor Moreil, a local practitioner, who willingly gave his services without thought of fee, had called once or twice and had seemed very pessimistic about the man's chances of recovery. Gillespie appeared to have had no friends, but shortly before his extraordinary decision to leave Paris a man of distinguished appearance had called on him. The landlady had conducted this visitor to the bedroom, and it had seemed to her that the man was not only a total stranger, but the visit unexpected, for as she closed the door she heard Gillespie say, "I do not remember your name, monsieur."

She described the stranger as tall, bearded, and dark, but a greatcoat and muffler had concealed most of the face. Two days later Gillespie had hurriedly packed his few belongings, and to her surprise had paid his bill and left money for the doctor. He was so weak that the driver of the taxi she had called had been compelled to help him down the stairs, and had even lifted him into the car. The rooms were still untenanted, fortunately for us, and, whilst Bannister went to gather

what information he could from Dr. Moreil, I followed Rousseau upstairs. The scantily furnished apartment was composed of a kitchen, a bedroom and small sitting-room. An anthracite stove of the type known as the Salamander immediately claimed our attention. Up to the time when Gillespie left, the weather had been warm and there had been no need for a fire. Great was our surprise, therefore, when the iron and mica front was unscrewed, to find that the heterogenous litter of matches, scraps of paper, and cigarette ends which a careless man usually throws into a stove were partly charred.

"A lighted match may have done this," Rousseau said thoughtfully, "but we'll put everything into a box for you to examine at the laboratory. One never knows."

On a table near the window were some sheets of common notepaper, a penholder with a broken nib, and a bottle of ink ; and crumpled into a ball beside the stove we discovered a torn and dirty piece of blotting-paper. Greatly disappointed at the absence of anything which might have disclosed the reason for the man's hasty departure, we returned to headquarters, where I at once set to work on the various objects we had taken away.

It was evening before Bannister arrived. Throwing his hat across the room, he settled himself comfortably and lit a cigar. I knew my friend of old, his nonchalant manner was a pose intended to draw me, so I countered by feigning to be absorbed in a chemical reaction. This had the desired result ; Bannister leant quickly forward and said :

"Dr. Moreil told me that Gillespie was suffering from a malignant growth, and that he could not have lived more than a few weeks. He believes the man was delirious and acting under the influence of a delusion when he suddenly packed and left his rooms."

"And the money paid to the landlady, and for his daughter's education," I asked sarcastically, "was that also a delusion ?"

"Wait a bit ! I traced the taxi-driver. Gillespie was taken to the Gare de Lyon, bought a ticket to Nice, and was hoisted into the two-twenty Ventimiglia express. I say 'hoisted',

because he could hardly walk, and the chauffeur and the porter assisted him. But he did not travel to Nice that night. At Dijon he staggered—the stationmaster used that expression—to the gate, gave up his ticket, and asked where he could find a doctor. The ticket-collector gave him an address and called a taxi. It appears a small crowd collected, because Gillespie suddenly collapsed, and a burly chauffeur, who had until then been sitting at the wheel of a big Renault limousine, thereupon picked him up with the words, "My boss is a doctor ; I'll take the poor devil there at once. The train I am waiting for will not be in for half an hour."

"That is the last anyone saw of the sick man until the other day, when his fiancée tried to speak to him as he came out of the Villa Algérienne in Nice."

"Good work," I said admiringly ; "you've lost no time. What do you make of it all ?"

"Bertillon is probably right : Gillespie fled from the police. I fancy the poor devil got mixed up with a gang of crooks, and the man who called was sent by them to warn him. He evidently brought Gillespie some money."

"It's just possible, of course," I replied. "If so, the incident of the waiting chauffeur at Dijon was prearranged. On the other hand, Gillespie may have possessed dangerous knowledge, and was decoyed to some isolated place and murdered. Here is the result of my work. The notepaper we found in his room was of the cheapest, commonest kind ; he had not written to anyone for many weeks, since the ink-bottle on his table was clotted with a dry residue of logwood, tannin, and iron, and the only pen in the room broken and rusty. In the stove, however, were charred fragments of a letter to his daughter, written with a fountain-pen on good linen paper, and the text of the letters his daughter and fiancée received from Nice, as well as part of a letter addressed to a lawyer or a notary, which had been blotted on a piece of blotting-paper we found behind the stove. From this I also obtained some sentences dealing with his daughter's education, and several words that are obviously part of a will. How does that fit in with your theory ?"

"It's curious, but quite easily explained. The man foresaw that he would have to disappear definitely."

"Quite so—but apparently he actually went to Nice. Why could he not have written those letters there? Come, the chief is waiting for my report: we'll put the matter before him."

Bertillon listened attentively to Bannister's story, but made no comment until he had studied my report and examined the photographs and exhibits, which he compared with some letters on the table. At last he looked up and said gravely:

"This is a most complex case. The writing-paper Gillespie used before he vanished is similar to that on which the letters the old lady received from her consumptive son were written. One was posted in Nîmes, the other in Algiers. The ink and nib also appear to have been the same in both instances. Moreover, I have here most of the letters sent to relatives from various parts of the world by those four men whose mysterious disappearance Dufresne reported, and every one has similar characteristics. The master criminal directing operations should not have made the mistake of always using the same type of paper. Queer, isn't it, that all these men were very ill? They were, in fact, slowly dying."

An eager gleam came into Bannister's eyes as the probable meaning of Bertillon's quiet words gradually emerged from the wealth of conflicting evidence.

"Do you suggest that every one of these men has been murdered?" he asked after a moment. "How can that be? After Gillespie left Paris he resided several months at the Villa Algérienne."

"Mademoiselle Delorme saw the man she thought was her fiancé only from a distance. Someone evidently masqueraded for a time as Gillespie in case enquiries were made. That explains why McGowan's money has not been claimed. The legacy is providential, a million to one chance which the criminal could not foresee. But for that, no one would have troubled about these missing men. They were poor, they were ill, and alone except for a mother, a daughter, or perhaps a sweetheart. Moreover, no important fraud or theft has been reported which would account for their flight from possible consequences.



Some monstrous scheme is behind all this, but what that scheme may be I cannot as yet conceive. Perhaps my latest method of elimination may help."

Bertillon pressed a bell and gave a curt order to the gendarme who answered, the summons. Five minutes later Inspector Louys appeared, and behind him came the clever Sûreté analyst, Lebrun.

"What have you to report, Inspector?" Bertillon asked.

"There are only three men capable of organizing wholesale murder such as you describe at present at liberty, so far as we know," Louys replied, placing several anthropometrical charts on the table. "Hanoi Shan—whereabouts unknown; Figuiet the Greek, who got away when we raided his place; and Jules Lebel, alias The Ghoul, who escaped from Cayenne, was traced to Dutch Guiana, and is probably back in Paris. Here is his formula."

I had heard of this monster, and was curious to see his photographs. In profile he was a huge squat mass of fat. The pear-shaped head emerged from a veritable cascade of chins that concealed all vestiges of a neck. Short bristling hair, bushy brows, and a flat negroid nose gave the creature the appearance of a gorilla; this appearance was increased by an abnormally deep chest swelling to an enormous barrel-shaped paunch. The full-face picture of Lebel was indescribably repulsive, and I saw that before his departure for Cayenne the man had weighed two hundred and sixty pounds. Bertillon retained the chart and noted the number of Lebel's dossier.

"Get to work, Inspector; send men wherever you think the fellow may be hiding. Let me have his record at once. Now, Monsieur Lebrun, what did you make of the paper?"

Thus adjured, the little fellow adjusted his glasses and began in a singsong nasal voice:

"Linen, tinted with cobalt, manufactured in Germany. Schaufeur and Hoffman of Leipzig. It is expensive, and they only sold a small quantity to the Louvre and the big stationer near the Stock Exchange. It cannot be bleached without marked discoloration. The letters are authentic; the same fountain-pen ink, probably of English manufacture, has been

used for every one. *But dates and addresses were added later, although the original writing has been cleverly imitated.*"

Bertillon nodded and seized his private telephone. "Has Inspector Colbert returned? Good, then send him to me. I think, Monsieur Bannister," he added, hanging up the receiver, "that in a few minutes we shall be in possession of the guiding thread." "Ah"—as my old friend Colbert came in: "Well, what news?"

"It has been hard work, sir—no fewer than two hundred men died of cancer in Paris during the month following upon the disappearance of Gillespie. I examined the official copy of every certificate and interviewed the doctors. I thus eliminated all but a Monsieur Lorel, who had resided nearly a year at Passy at the Villa Les Eglantines. The place is isolated, and has a fairly spacious garden, not far from the Seine. Lorel had been a traveller for cotton goods, was apparently in good health until a few months ago, then unexpectedly became very ill and died within a short time. There were no servants: his wife nursed him and a doctor came from Paris. I have spoken with him—Doctor Pierrelond, a cancer specialist. There is no doubt Lorel died of a malignant growth—the technical details are here," and Colbert handed Bertillon a sheet of paper. "No one saw the man during his illness, but there were several mourners' carriages at the funeral. The undertaker's assistant believes that at least ten people, men and women, followed the hearse. Lorel was insured with the *Assurances Parisiennes* for two hundred and fifty thousand francs! The money went to his wife, who left soon after and has not as yet been traced."

"Was Lorel really married?"

"I cannot say; I have found no entry so far. He had a car, however, and I obtained his duplicate photograph from the department that issued his driving licence. Here it is."

Bertillon examined the tiny picture attentively, jotted down various details on a form, and handed it to Rousseau. "See if we have him in our records," he said laconically. Then, when the Brigadier had gone, he turned again to us:

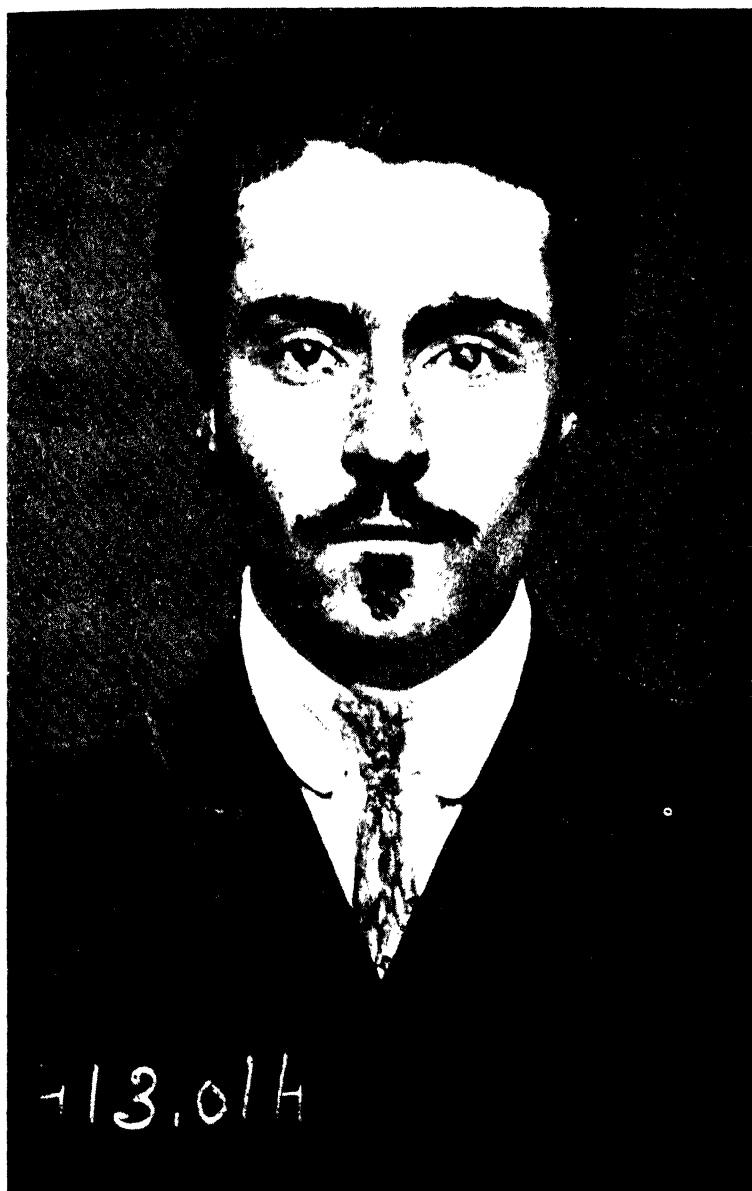
"You begin to understand, Monsieur Bannister? The

scheme is diabolically clever. Either Lorel is a party to the fraud or he was tricked. In either case as soon as he was insured someone was needed to take his place, who would die a natural death within a short time since, Lorel was not ill. And I believe that in this instance Gillespie was the man chosen. He was poor, his days were undoubtedly numbered, and he was anxious to provide for his daughter. A man in such straits would willingly accept the conditions these scoundrels imposed. The more so since they were absurdly simple. Several letters were dictated, to be posted later, and the poor devil was merely to forgo the doubtful advantage of dying in his own name. In the case of the boy who wrote from Nimes, the money went to his mother ; Gillespie provided for his daughter's future. No doubt a sentimental reason for the substitution was given, instead of the truth. It only remains to discover who the other heavily insured men were who apparently died of the same maladies from which the boy at Dijon and Dufresne's missing men suffered. I say 'heavily insured', because that is obvious. It is possible even that Lorel and those others were murdered, but I do not think so. Anyway, it's murder or fraud on a large scale, and if, merely fraud, Gillespie was probably an innocent accomplice."

"By Jove," Bannister exclaimed, "what a fiendish scheme ! To crown it all, one of the gang openly settled for a time in Nice as James Gillespie, in case enquiries about him were made."

"Exactly, and but for the uncle in Canada we should never have investigated the matter. You see, even the insurance companies were satisfied. A natural death, a certificate delivered by a famous doctor, to whom the patient was a stranger, of course, and a genuine funeral. Yes ?" The door had opened and Rousseau came hurriedly forward, "Lorel is François Ducot, twice sentenced for forgery !"

"That settles it," Bertillon exclaimed excitedly. "Ducot was a toady of the Ghoul. I will at once apply for permission to exhume Gillespie, alias Lorel. It must be done secretly, or these creatures will take fright. Poor Mademoiselle Delorme, I cannot decently ask her to identify the body. We must take



AN ARTIST'S TRIUMPH! — A RECONSTRUCTED PORTRAIT OF THE  
OBTAINED BY SUPERPOSING DRAWINGS OF WHAT HE MUST HAVE  
DURING LIFE UNTIL THE RESULT WAS AKIN TO A PHOTO



photographs; the landlady where Gillespie lived will be useful. To-morrow evening, then, we meet here again."

Since we desired above all to prevent the scoundrels who had conceived and successfully carried out such gruesome frauds from learning of the exhumation, a cleverly reconstructed sketch was made from the photographs obtained when the coffin had been transferred to the laboratory. This sketch depicted the man as he must have appeared when alive, and when it was submitted to Dr. Moreil, Mlle. Delorme, and the landlady in the Rue Desresnaudes, they declared it to be an excellent portrait of James Gillespie.

Detectives were thereupon sent to examine the books of the principal insurance companies, and it was ascertained that several million francs had been paid recently in circumstances that resembled the sudden decease of the man posing as Lorel. But as yet no clue to the criminals, beyond the real identity of the dying man who had masqueraded as Lorel, had been obtained. The problem that I tried in vain to solve was, how did these wily plotters find men not only about to die, but who in every instance could be relied upon to take the place of a member of their organization after he had been insured? I was soon to learn that my chief had also pounced on this as the one flaw in an otherwise flawless scheme. When I entered his office as usual one morning to report, I found him in earnest conversation with the famous specialist, Hermann-Villars, whilst Bannister lounged by the window.

"We are progressing," Bertillon remarked briskly, when at last the doctor had withdrawn. "I have been in touch with the various hospitals. Like all great cities, Paris is supposed to be callous and selfish, yet it would seem that there are many worthy people even in our modern Babylon who strive to do good without seeking the reward of public recognition. The Marquis Pascal de Saint Martel, for instance, is considered by the medical world to be a philanthropist of exceptional merit. When a victim of some incurable disease cannot pay for the necessary treatment, the Marquis, who resides at Les Chênes, a beautiful, old-fashioned house at Auteuil, always helps them.

"Dr. Hermann-Villars informed me that he had given the

names of many such poor derelicts to this charitable man. The Lariboisière hospital will therefore inform the alleged Marquis to-morrow that they have no room in their isolation ward for a poor fellow suffering from Leichmaniose, commonly known in the East as Kala-Azar, a glandular disease transmitted by canine parasites, and that only a special treatment of sunbaths and electricity can save the patient, who is, however, quite destitute. Special stress will be laid on the fact that even with every care it is feared the man will die. So we may expect developments. I am convinced the fellow who styles himself the Marquis de Saint Martel is an accomplice of the criminals we are after. It may be even that Les Chênes is their headquarters. Colbert will play the part of the penniless patient ; Rousseau and Louys have been ordered to be constantly on duty at the Café de la Seine, which is close to the aristocratic philanthropist's house ; and you two must find a convenient spot near the gates and note who comes and who goes.

"I am determined to capture the whole gang. Dress as riverside loafers, and be careful not to arouse suspicion. If they do not choose Colbert for their next 'dying man' we'll try our luck with some other malady. I believe they will be only too eager, however ; cancer and phthisis have been used too often. That is why I choose a rare ailment for them. Above all, report at once if you see Jules Lebel. Somehow I feel sure he originated this scheme."

Bannister squeezed my arm delightedly when we gained the street. "Quite like old times, eh ?" he said with a chuckle. "Colbert is coming to my make-up room in the Rue Scribe. I am going to transform him into a perfect example of the dread Kala-Azar disease. I'll bet his hollow cheeks and glittering eyes will deceive anyone. He has rented a filthy garret at La Villette because the concierge is an agent of the Sûreté. This man will come at once to Auteuil and warn us if the kindly Marquis decides to use our colleague. I have told him to look for two ragged betting touts."

With the help of Bannister's beautifully equipped dressing-room we soon looked the part. Dirty, unkempt, but with just that sporting touch so common on the racecourse, we spent the

rest of the day loafing in the vicinity of Les Chênes. Towards dusk Bannister, who had been unusually silent, suddenly exclaimed angrily, "What fools we are to waste our time in front of the house! I noticed that the garden runs down to the Seine, but the significance of that has only just dawned on me. Like Hanoi Shan, these crooks prefer the river to the roads. I thought it curious that there were no wheel-tracks in the soft ground by the gates. Look, the same slim motor-launch that went downstream when we crossed the bridge has just passed again. Dollars to dimes it belongs to this gang."

Keeping well under the trees, we ran to the river and were just in time to see the launch enter a boathouse built into the bank. Pressing my ear against the side of the building I perceived a faint murmur of voices, but to our surprise, although we waited several hours, no one came out. Suddenly Bannister gripped my arm.

"What a queer thing!" he whispered. "The doors overhang the water, and there is no opening at the back. In order to land, the men in the boathouse would have to wade ashore. How the devil do they come and go? The water is quite deep."

"I'll fetch Rousseau," I replied. "He has his tools with him: we must find out what this means. It will be night very soon, then we can have a peep inside that place."

I found my colleagues at their post in the Café de la Seine, and quickly related what we had discovered. Fortunately there was no moon, and Rousseau was able to set to work on the lock at once, upheld by Louys and Bannister, who were compelled to stand with the river swirling about their shoulders.

At last I heard a faint snap and the door swung wide. With infinite caution we felt our way to a broad landing-stage and flashed the beams of our lamps about the hut. It was silent and deserted; only the launch rose and fell lazily at her moorings. The mysterious disappearance of the crew whose voices we had heard was uncanny, but suddenly Louys, who had been feeling along the boat's gunwale, pointed to a rope at the bows. It was fastened to a ring which projected from an iron plate apparently embedded in a frame of concrete. "That looks like a trapdoor," he murmured. "It probably masks



a tunnel leading to the house. See—there is an insulated wire twisted round the rope. Either an alarm bell or a telephone. I'll get an inconspicuous motor-boat in which to follow those who leave by water, whilst you continue to watch the shore. We must wait until we know who is in that house."

Hardly had we withdrawn when a whistle sounded from the river, the dazzling beam of a searchlight flickered over the windows of the distant mansion, and the swirl of a propeller warned us that a second launch was rapidly approaching the bank. The signal had evidently been expected, for the doors of the boathouse swung open and a lamp in the roof glowed brightly. We were near enough to see a huge woman wrapped in furs, her face hidden by a veil, swing herself with catlike agility to the landing-stage as the craft came alongside. I had never seen such a monstrous creature, yet in spite of her bulk her movements were incredibly swift and supple. Rousseau touched my arm and whispered :

"That's Jules Lebel. No wonder we could not find him. The cloak and veil make a good disguise, but no woman would be so sure-footed. Lebel, in spite of his girth, is strong and active as a gorilla."

As I stared, anxious to probe the secret of the tunnel, the light went out, the doors shut, and the boathouse again fell silent. My two friends were wet to the skin and shivering with cold, so, although I dreaded the solitude, I was compelled to remain while they returned to headquarters for dry clothes.

Something about the ponderous and apparently clumsy mass of the Ghoul, in such contrast to the tigerish abruptness of his motions, had awakened a feeling of repulsion in me that almost amounted to panic. I realized that this shapeless monster of fat was a formidable athlete with muscles of steel, who would not hesitate to kill. Details of the crime for which he was sent to Cayenne came back to me. His victim had been found mangled and smashed as though the wheels of the Juggernaut had ground him into the earth, and I shuddered at the thought that a similar fate might be mine.

Somewhere upstream a tug hooted dismally ; the black river hissed and swirled softly past the banks ; and every now

and then an unexpected splash, as the current dashed a piece of floating debris against the shore, caused me to start in sudden alarm. But for these sounds and an indefinable murmur from the distant city, the silence was complete. The few twinkling lights from isolated dwellings which came and went as the wind moved the trees, only accentuated the enveloping darkness. The hours dragged interminably, and midnight had already tolled at the church of Auteuil, when abruptly I espied a dim shape drifting slowly past. A faint whistle that only just reached me was unutterably welcome; it was Louys patrolling the shore in a police launch. A moment later the keel drove against the bank, a grapnel thudded into the soft earth, and, guided by my answering whistle, my colleague quickly rejoined me.

"I ran into Bannister and the Brigadier at headquarters," he said. "Dufresne has ordered them to watch the house where Colbert is playing the dying pauper. It seems the concierge has vanished. His wife, who knows nothing of his connection with the Sûreté, told the local *commissaire* that just before dinner her husband was invited by two strangers to crack a bottle of wine, and that since then he has not returned. You'd better join me on the launch; we'll lie hidden near this boat-house. If Lebel is suspicious, he may send men with dogs to search the vicinity."

I was very grateful for my friend's suggestion, for I could not shake off a vague feeling that some silent inimical presence was lurking under the trees. We had hardly pushed off, when the purr of a powerful engine broke the silence, and a long grey mass slipped with spluttering propeller from the boathouse. It was gone in an instant, but Louys lost no time in getting up speed, and as we passed between the piles of the first bridge we caught sight of our quarry not five hundred yards away. Evidently the men on board realized that they could be stopped for having no lights, and when they neared the Louvre embankment, the launch slowed down and the regulation lamps were switched on. This made our task easier, since we could drop out of sight without risk, keeping just sufficiently to starboard for me to pick up their green light with my binoculars. The

chase lasted an hour, but finally the boat ran alongside a warehouse at the Quai de Bercy. We landed at once and raced up the embankment steps just in time to see three men, dressed in blue canvas and rough woollen jerseys, emerge from a shed used for storing barrels of wine. Keeping well in the shadows we followed them through a maze of narrow streets until I had quite lost all sense of direction. Fortunately, Louys knew the district well.

"Are you armed?" he asked, suddenly thrusting me into a doorway as the men halted before a rambling dilapidated building that looked unutterably sinister. "That is the Cité du Nord, one of the most infamous hotels in Paris. All the scum of the markets and slaughter-houses meet there, and it is a favourite haunt of the Villette apaches. It was there the Ghoul was once captured."

"I have a pistol—but only one clip."

"Too much or too little," Louys grunted. "Look, they are not going in—the doorkeeper has evidently given them a message. Where are they off to now?"

Something seemed to have startled our quarry, they peered suspiciously about them a moment, and then unexpectedly vanished under a huge ruined archway; which squatted like some uncouth idol over the entrance to a gaping passage. Taking cover behind a string of wagons heaped with barrels, we ran swiftly across the street and followed on their heels. One of the men had switched on a pocket lamp and was fumbling at the lock of a massive nail-studded door, a relic from the past and as it opened I gazed with amazement at a row of powerful automobiles standing side by side like silent sentries. A glance was enough to convince me that they were in perfect condition and ready to erupt into instant thunderous life. In that gloomy, sinister place those cars, with their glittering metalwork, were an incredible sight. The vision of the Ghoul, that monster of fat, leaping ashore with the lithe, supple motion of a cat, rose before me, and I realized that we were at grips with a truly formidable criminal whose cunning brain left nothing to chance and who, even while success seemed certain, foresaw defeat and prepared for instant flight.

"I don't know why the boss orders us to test the engines every night!" one of the men growled disgustedly. "He makes sure we've come, too, by telephoning to Raoul. What was it he said?"

"Lebel thinks there's trouble ahead. We're to fill up all the tanks and see to the tyres, and then to come back at once. Shut that door—we don't want the noise of the engines to attract some slinking police spy."

The warning was not wasted; we slipped noiselessly into the street again and returned by devious ways to the river. At that hour taxis were rare, whereas by boat we could reach the Quai des Orfèvres before dawn. Only the usual gendarmes were on duty at headquarters, but before going to the service room for a much needed rest I telephoned to the *commissaire* at the Quai de Bercy and ordered him to post cyclist police on the roads leading from the city.

It was past ten when Bertillon sent for me, and his haggard face and bloodshot eyes spoke eloquently of a night spent poring over dossiers and records.

"I am uneasy," he said when I had related our adventures. "The missing concierge has not been traced. His wife reported that early this morning Colbert was taken from his room by two well-dressed men, who told her they were sending him to a nursing-home on the Riviera. But he was not taken to the house where I've learned that another of these rascals is feigning to be desperately ill, although it stands in an isolated spot and he could have been smuggled in without risk. It is possible, of course, that they prefer to wait until dark."

"But Rousseau and Bannister were at La Villette. Didn't they follow Colbert?"

"That is what makes me so anxious. Neither has been seen, nor has any message come. The warrants will be ready shortly. We raid Les Chênes and the Cité du Nord simultaneously to-night. I had hoped to be able to wait until definite evidence of their past activities had been obtained, but I realize that we must act immediately. Go to Auteuil again with Louys. I have ordered barges to be so placed up and down stream that they can be instantly strung across the river. You will find

some mechanics testing the telephone wires near the Marquis' house ; they are your colleagues. Inspector Taverine will tap the line and report if Lebel telephones to Bercy. Perhaps your American friend has followed Colbert after all, but cannot get to a 'phone. You may expect Dufresne and myself about midnight. We shall come by boat—three green lights at the bows. If anything unforeseen happens before then, act on your own initiative. But for heaven's sake don't let the Ghoul escape. Go well armed, and if you must shoot, don't hesitate—those scoundrels won't."

Louys was waiting for me with the launch, and we were soon at Auteuil. My interview with Bertillon had prepared me for signs of unusual activity in the neighbourhood of Les Chênes, but when we strolled down the avenue all was silent and deserted, and I searched in vain for the workmen. Louys laughed when I remarked on this.

"It would look pretty suspicious if union men did not knock off at twelve, wouldn't it ? They've left their portable forge, and the old watchman eating bread and cheese by the roadside is Papa Laplace. He looks sleepy and foolish, but watch him as we pass."

A shrivelled old fellow rose as we approached, and, pulling a dirty pipe from his pocket, begged for a match. Between puffs of rank Caporal tobacco he grunted, "The boys are at the Café de la Seine, Inspector. Nothing much as yet. Those people in the big house are no fools. A serving wench went to telephone from the café. Our work on the wires has made them suspicious."

"Did you get the message ?"

"*Naturellement*—Nord 24-85—that's the Cité du Nord. She said 'See that the horses are well groomed—they may be needed for the next race.' Does that convey any meaning ?"

Louys nodded and, lighting a cigarette, sauntered on.

"The horses she meant are the sixty horses beneath each bonnet," he said, chuckling, "and the race will be with us, or so they think."

We found a hiding-place under the trees, which gave us a view of the river, but hardly had we settled down for our long

wait when a thought that had been struggling to take shape in my brain abruptly crystallized. I had noted subconsciously that the ears of the old man who had stopped us were pierced for earrings.

"That was not Papa Laplace!" I cried sharply. "Quick, get him before Lebel finds out that we know of the cars at Bercy," and without further ado I darted up the road. We were just in time; the bogus police agent was leisurely knotting his ragged kerchief, ready to slip away.

"Wait a bit!" I shouted. "What have you got in there?"

"Only some food," he mumbled. "Don't be a fool—your pal knows me."

"In that case you have nothing to fear. Now, Louys—did our colleague ever wear earrings?"

"Here come the workmen," my friend replied grimly, "and Laplace is with them. They must pretend to search the bundle and then charge the fellow with theft and put him in a cell. Be careful he doesn't drop a note or signal to the house. Here, Laplace, play this rascal's game! Ring at the gate and say, 'Everything all right. The *Roussins* [detectives] don't know about the horses yet. But I'm staying to watch them; get away before questions are asked. We'll be near the bridge; don't speak to us, but light your pipe if all's well.'"

An anxious half-hour dragged by, then Laplace shuffled past, stopping a moment to strike a match.

"Lucky you noticed his ears—but for that his make-up was perfect. I guess Lebel is no fool. I'll 'phone Dufresne at once. I'll bet that apparently quiet house is humming inside like a beehive."

"Yes," I answered, "and the reason is obvious. They saw through Colbert—and from that moment the game was up. He is probably a prisoner in their hands. We dare not wait until midnight. Tell Bertillon that as soon as it's dark we are going into the tunnel. They are not aware we discovered that. I'll warn our men."

The danger to which Colbert was exposed made me eager to enter Lebel's stronghold, and as soon as it could be done without risk I crept along the bank to the boathouse, followed

by Louys and four subordinates. We were still debating the best method of forcing the doors, when these opened abruptly and a bloodstained, bedraggled figure staggered to the shore. It was Rousseau, wounded and almost fainting. A broken chain dangling from his left wrist told its own tale.

"Come, for God's sake!" the old fellow gasped. "They are torturing Bannister and Colbert in the hope of learning our plans. I heard Lebel order a stove to be lit to roast their feet. I've been hanging by my thumbs for an hour, but managed to twist free. It was to be my turn next. I killed the fellow who came to fetch me. Lebel had shut us in a cellar. By mere chance I found the door to the tunnel. One of the men who came to visit Colbert at La Villette was a doctor, and he saw through the trick. As soon as they had Colbert safely in their car they injected a narcotic, and when he was helpless, put him on board a launch. We followed, of course, but the devils had another launch behind, and before we could get to shore they boarded and collared us. Give me a drink and I'll go with you—it's going to be a fight, and we must hurry."

Rousseau had driven a wedge under the iron door to the tunnel to prevent it from closing, and I saw that he had also severed the wire of the alarm bell. Thanks to his foresight we reached the cellar where our colleagues had been imprisoned without alarming the men in the house. The guard Rousseau had killed still lay where he had fallen—evidently his absence had passed unnoticed. Creeping along the wall as silently as ghosts, we gained a passage on the ground floor. Several doors opened from this, and we had halted for a moment, undecided which to try first, when a wild despairing cry from the end of the passage followed by jeers and coarse laughter told us what we wished to know. That scream of agony goaded us to frenzy. With one accord we threw ourselves at the door, tearing it from lock and hinges, and rushed forward with levelled pistols.

Colbert lay across a table, held by a chain passed beneath it, whilst Bannister sprawled helplessly on a narrow bench. His legs had been lashed to a stout frame, and a fire roared and crackled in an iron stove by his feet. Our advent was utterly unexpected, and the group of ruffians watching this

hideous scene scattered in dismay. Already we had driven them into a corner, when with a bellow of rage Jules Lebel hurled himself at us from the doorway, head down, like a charging bull, and changed our victory into a rout. The impact was terrific ! I crashed into a chair, rending and splintering it as I fell headlong, whilst Louys and two of our men collapsed across my body, sending my automatic flying. Only Rousseau avoided that irresistible avalanche. Flames spurted from his pistols in one continuous roar, and before this hail of death our assailants fled in terror, leaving three of their number lying in a twisted heap. Lebel callously kicked them aside, and flinging a stick at the lamp in the ceiling, vanished. A gulp of brandy steadied our reeling brains ; while Rousseau stayed to succour Bannister and Colbert, we raced to the tunnel. But Lebel had foreseen this move and the heavy iron door was already closed.

"Search the house—some may be hiding there," I cried to Louys. "I'll warn the river police ; the barges should be in position by now."

Again I was fated to learn how wily was the monster we hunted. The garden had been wired, and before I had gone twenty steps I sprawled helplessly on my face. By the time I reached the nearest telephone the launches had got safely away, and, to make matters worse, our boat had been smashed and was quite useless. Yet, after all, the Ghoul's cunning plans miscarried. Bertillon had taken no chances. During the afternoon a Sûreté officer had entered the building where the cars were stored, and, instead of destroying the engines, had merely punctured every tyre. Thus the police arrived in time to see the men feverishly at work on the wheels, and captured every one. Only Jules Lebel got away. He was truly a crafty creature. Instead of following his friends to the Cité du Nord, he remained on one of the launches and continued downstream. At Rouen he hired a fast car and gained the coast, and from that moment he vanished. Nor was the money obtained from the insurance companies recovered. It is probable the Ghoul always carried it with him.

Colbert was seriously injured. His thumbs had been crushed



to pulp and both his arms broken. Our opportune arrival had saved Bannister from a similar fate, but his feet were badly blistered. He hobbled into Bertillon's office some days later, cheerful as ever.

"Out of evil comes good," he said. "Mademoiselle Delorme and Gillespie's daughter have heard from the notary. Each inherits half of the uncle's money."

"That is well," Bertillon replied gravely. "But even if the case no longer interests *you*, there will be no rest for *us* until the Ghoul is caught. The dossier has just been placed on shelf E. You know what that means?"

"Yes, my friend calls it the shelf of the unsolved problems. Well, if that is so, I'll stay in Paris. I guess I've also an account to settle with that devil."

**EPISODE V**  
**THE ELEPHANT'S FOOT**



## THE ELEPHANT'S FOOT

THE joy of the artisan who proudly contemplates the edifice at which he has patiently laboured as it slowly takes shape irradiated Bertillon's pale, thoughtful face. His voice vibrated with eagerness, and the old habit of ceaselessly kneading a piece of modelling wax into fantastic shapes with his supple fingers betrayed his inward excitement. At every telling point in his discourse he gazed keenly at his attentive audience, seeking for a sign of scepticism. He had summoned his favourite pupils to his office that day in order to demonstrate the importance of his latest development in scientific detection, and the hours had swiftly passed whilst we listened and learned.

Dufresne, the Sûreté chief, sat by his side, taciturn and somewhat hostile; Louys and I were kept busy removing exhibits and dossiers as case after case was analysed and the minute and often apparently irrelevant details that had finally led to the capture of the criminals were displayed, whilst Rousseau reclined in a corner with expressionless face, although I had caught the movement of his busy pencil as he furtively made notes; in the background were Bannister and a group of Sûreté detectives. It was a silent but appreciative audience, and I had an odd, fleeting impression that we were so many disciples listening to the extolling of a new philosophy, in the days when science and wisdom were the prerogative of a chosen few.

"Paris, for instance, might be compared to a huge pond," Bertillon exclaimed in conclusion. "Throw a stone into it, and the ripples cross the entire surface, disturbing the countless living creatures in the water as they pass, until they finally die away on the opposite shore. But those fugitive ripples

have left their mark on the bottom and on every inch of the bank, so that an observer armed with sufficiently sensitive instruments could determine the size of the stone that was cast into the pond, the strength with which it struck the water, the time of the impact, and even the exact distance. The image is inadequate, but the stone and the arm that gave it momentum can be likened to one of the many criminal undertakings that daily disturb the even rhythm of a city's life; and if we, the watchers, observe and note every ripple of the surface, we also can determine at any moment whence an untoward act has come.

"Every crime belongs to a specific category. It has been committed before in like fashion, and will be committed again. Only the details vary, and usually the variation is insignificant. Therefore if each unit of our complex organization will carefully note, report, and classify every occurrence, however unimportant it may seem, the knowledge thus gathered will surely be useful someday. After all, it is by a similar method that doctors fight disease, and what is crime but a disease? There are only so many forms of illness, and because medical science has classified every known disease and its symptoms, a doctor deduces from a broken rhythm in the body what the evil is, and where it lurks. We have already the criminal identity department, to which we add daily. I now intend to create a *crime identity department*, so that when we are informed that a murder, a theft, or a swindle has been committed we shall be able, by comparing the details with those already noted in similar cases, to discover the malefactor merely by a process of elimination. Every one of us must henceforth assist in adding to this methodically gathered store of knowledge by reporting all that goes on."

"A huge undertaking," Dufresne remarked. "What you suggest, in other words, is the creation of a crime encyclopædia."

"I'd like to get this clear, sir," Rousseau interrupted. "Are we to note *everything* unusual, even though it may not be criminal? For instance, one of my men, Inspector Morel, on duty last night at the Villette, related that about midnight he and a colleague heard yells and oaths and the sounds of a sudden

fierce battle proceeding from that infamous apache haunt in the Passage Tavernier known as "La Mère l'Oie". The door was locked, but Morel smashed a shutter and forced his way in. At his unexpected appearance several men jumped through a window at the back and escaped. One of the combatants, however, had been struck on the head with a bottle and sprawled on the floor. He still clutched the torn half of a map, a motorist's map of France, of all things, and when he was brought to his senses he explained sulkily that he and a pal had quarrelled because he wouldn't show him this map. That fool Morel actually took elaborate notes of everything, even to the number on the torn road-map and the name of the printer," and the old fellow grunted indignantly. Of course Rousseau's story was received with a shout of laughter from his colleagues, and Bannister exclaimed :

"Your apaches are becoming educated, Monsieur Bertillon. Those two were evidently bent on studying geography."

But my chief did not appear to find the episode amusing ; instead of joining in the general merriment, as we fully expected, he said thoughtfully :

"Your man did the right thing, Rousseau. I am glad you told me this. No better illustration of the value of apparently unimportant occurrences could be imagined. Doesn't it strike you as queer, knowing the mentality of the creatures who frequent the "Mother Goose Tavern," that they should come to blows over such an absurd and incongruous object? Now see how it develops. I lunched to-day at the Savoria Restaurant. Next to me sat old Monsieur Ambroise Dugas, who keeps the famous students' bookshop at the corner of the Faubourg Saint Germain."

At the mention of Ambroise Dugas, Rousseau chuckled. "I know him well, Monsieur. The queer creature is always waylaying me and inviting me to try his wines, in the hope that I shall tell him about our latest cases. He devours every crime story he can find, and believes that he has the making of a great detective in him."

"That's the man. As you say, he is a quaint character, a kindly old soul who would burn all those ridiculous novels

he reads if he ever saw a *real* crime. Well, the moment I sat down I perceived he was afire with eagerness to talk to me. He thinks he has at last stumbled on something unusual, and of course scents a gruesome mystery. It appears that during the last ten days he has sold hundreds of maps. All his customers seem to have succumbed to the same craze. Maps of China, India, Ceylon, and France have been bought in such quantities that his stock has been cleared out, yet the men who bought them did not appear to be the type that would trouble to study geography. At first the old fellow imagined that a paper or magazine had started a competition which demanded a knowledge of foreign lands, but although he searched for days he could discover no trace of such a competition. Then yesterday a furtive, sly-looking youth in velveteen trousers and jacket, and wearing *espadrilles*, came into the shop with a huge bundle which contained nearly all the maps Dugas had sold, besides many from other shops, and offered to trade them for a dozen road maps of France.

"He had with him a list of the firms who print these, and explained that he required only one specimen of each kind. Of course, Monsieur Dugas agreed to the bargain at once, for he noticed that the maps the fellow had brought were stained and greasy, and that many had figures and words pencilled on the margins. As soon as his strange customer had gone Monsieur Dugas examined each map, and noted what he thinks are clues, nor is he altogether mistaken. I have his list here. Let's see—there were many traces of cheap blue wine and raw spirits; all smelled of rank tobacco; several had holes in the corners as though they had been pinned to a board or a table; and all had a hole exactly in the centre. An expensive map of India had evidently been laid on a wet table in a common restaurant, and part of the menu, written with a copying pencil, has marked the back. The old fellow is bringing the whole bundle to-night. He was clever enough to tell the youth in the velveteen clothes to come back in three days time, because he would have to order a sample from each of the publishers. What new fraud has been invented, for which all these maps are needed, I cannot conceive as yet. I have

no data—but be sure it is something unusual. I should probably not have paid much attention to our amateur detective but for what Rousseau has just reported. Apaches don't fight amongst themselves without a serious reason, and that reason, whatever it may be, interests us. Go to the "Mother Goose Tavern", at once, Rousseau, and let me know who comes and goes. Report to-morrow morning. I shall spend a few hours examining the old bookseller's clues"; then, turning to me, he added: "I think you had better come back after dinner, in case I need you."

"And may I be present, Monsieur Bertillon, when you examine these maps?" Bannister interposed as my chief rose. The American's eagerness brought a smile to Bertillon's face.

"Sure," he said in English, with a good imitation of Bannister's lazy drawl. "You are one of us. I have no secrets from you."

As we left the Sûreté, a taxi drew up at the Quai des Orfèvres and I saw Monsieur Dugas stagger out, a bulky parcel clutched in his arms. Somehow the fantastic, grotesque nature of the occurrence fired my imagination, although I could not conceive what the scheme that involved this sudden frenzied buying of maps could be. I felt sure, however, that Bertillon would quickly solve the puzzle. When, after a hasty meal, we hurried back to the laboratory, I could not repress a cry of dismay as I threw open the door of the microscope section. It was my habit to keep the room tidy and neat; now it appeared as though a great wind had scattered my carefully classified documents over tables, benches, and floor. Dozens of maps, all the countries of the globe, were strewn wherever there was space. The big central table had been cleared regardless of slides and lenses, and there Bertillon crouched, under the glare of a sizzling arc-lamp, scrutinizing sheet after sheet, whilst Lebrun, our analyst, worked feverishly with Bunsen flame and spectroscope.

Bertillon laughed when he saw my eyes roving round the room in which I took such pride.

"We've made a beastly mess, I'm afraid. But it can't be helped. This business is really interesting; I've not met with



the like before. Here is what we have discovered : India, Ceylon, and France predominate, and every one of the maps has been pinned to a table at the exact spot where two lines, drawn diagonally, cross each other. Moreover, as you can see by the smears on the back, each sheet was then made to rotate slowly. Food and drink of the coarsest have stained the paper, and here and there I have found single, blurred fingerprints. They are, unfortunately, quite useless. There are also some vague figures, as though someone had tried to work out distances or speed, for in several instances the word *kilometres* has been added : and the half of a map of France which was taken from the apache by Morel last night has this curious pencilled note on the margin. *There are no elephants in Algiers."*

"Good lord!" Bannister exclaimed. "Are the fellows floating a swindle in ivory?"

"Well, I don't know. Such a theory would hardly explain this sudden craze for maps. Anyhow, for the moment we can do little except make a list of the people who print these things and try to find out from which shops they were bought and by whom. The originators of this mysterious scheme are not aware they have attracted our attention, and will no doubt make a move soon. To-morrow, when the fellow who brought this bundle to Dugas' bookshop comes again, he will be followed; perhaps we shall learn something then. I have also given orders for all advertisements in the daily papers that seem to have a bearing on the matter to be brought to me. You may photograph and index the stains and writing, but there is no hurry. I am sorry I spoiled your evening."

I could see Bannister was disappointed. He evidently had prepared himself for a dramatic and immediate solution, but, knowing Bertillon's ways, he merely made a note of the data in our possession and left me to my work.

When I arrived at the Sûrete the following morning, I had shelved the whole matter, and was much surprised therefore to find Louys waiting for me on the stairs.

"Come along," he cried eagerly. "Our latest problem has already led to a killing."

"What do you mean?" I said. "An arrest has been made?"

"No—a murder was committed last night in an obscure lodging-house in the Rue de Tolède, at Pantin, and from the description of the victim it is the young ruffian who brought that bundle of dirty maps to Dugas' shop. Rousseau captured two men who were probably concerned in the crime as they were climbing into a car which had been standing for some time outside the inn of "La Mere l'Oie". Their agitation made him suspicious, and the powerful Renault touring-car did not fit the neighbourhood, so he demanded to see their papers. Instead of complying one of the men jerked a pistol from his pocket and fired. The bullet ripped a piece of skin from the Brigadier's shoulder, but Rousseau is used to such trifles, and before the fellow could shoot again he covered both with his automatic and held them until help arrived."

Louys narrated all this in quick, short sentences while hastening with me to Bertillon's office.

At the door we ran into Morel and two gendarmes who were waiting to be admitted. The detective was obviously elated.

"See," he cried, "Inspector Rousseau laughed at me because I had followed the chief's instructions to the letter and noted every detail of the fight at the "Mother Goose Tavern". Already I can add to that report. The big printing works of Nadau and Cie were broken into early this morning. But, although the burglars were skilled men, and the safe old-fashioned, they contented themselves with an armful of maps. Yes"—as Louys and I stared incredulously—"maps, I tell you. All the criminals of Paris have suddenly gone mad——"

The whirr of a bell interrupted his eager speech, and the door to my chief's office swung wide. Bertillon was dressed for the street and about to leave, but when Morel had briefly outlined his discovery he sat down again and removed his hat. "Let me hear what occurred," he said sharply. "I felt sure we could expect developments at any moment, but I did not expect murder and burglary."

"The thieves entered through a window, Monsieur Bertillon. It was protected by strong wire netting, which they removed

from the staples in the wall by means of a metal-cutting saw ; I found a broken blade on the ground. The glass was smashed, but the pieces had been prevented from falling by the clever use of a lump of pitch attached to a wooden handle. I have touched nothing, but I think the men who did the work wore gloves. I noticed a shred of leather dangling from a jagged fragment of glass. They must have known the premises well, for they went straight to the map department and abstracted only a few from each shelf. The drawers in the manager's desk were ransacked, but the safe, an old-fashioned affair, has not been touched."

"How was the spoil removed ?"

"By car—a small Ford lorry was seen at the rear of the works by a tramp. He passed just as the men drove away and hurried to the local police station with the news. It was then about two in the morning."

"At what time was the murder discovered at Pantin ?" Bertillon asked, turning to Louys.

"Soon after midnight. The man had only just died when Rousseau returned after arresting the two men in the car and searched the house. He remained on guard so that nothing should be disturbed."

"Very well, then let us go there at once."

Bannister arrived as we were about to start, and climbed in beside the driver. The dingy ruined tenement in the Rue de Tolède was the centre of an excited, hostile crowd of frowsy shrill-voiced women and villainous loafers, who saluted our appearance with ironic cheers. Bertillon viewed them critically a moment and then gave a curt order to the waiting police.

"Close the street at both ends ; we may have to question these people ; but don't let them see they are trapped, if you can avoid it."

Rousseau was sitting in the passage on the third floor. He had made himself as comfortable as possible on a broken couch in such fashion that he could watch the window and the stairs simultaneously. The door of the room in which the dead apache sprawled in an ungainly heap was wide open, and I stared unbelievably at the velvet-covered chairs and costly



MARIUS THE CAT, OF THE CROOKED SMILE



THE BOTTLE AND LAMP-GLASS WITH FINGERPRINTS REVEALING THE FACT THAT "THE GHOUL" HAD OCCUPIED THE ROOM



writing-table that furnished it, they were in such contrast to the gloomy house and dirty stairs. The old Brigadier saw my surprise and chuckled.

"Whoever lodged here had taste and knew how to surround himself with nice things, *hein*?" he remarked. "It's lucky I broke a carefully organized line of communication by arresting those men with the car before they could get to their leader. Someone was very anxious to examine that fellow on the floor before you came. The landlord sidled up the stairs a while ago and tried to start a noisy quarrel so as to give one of his ruffians a chance to climb in from the ledge outside the window. But I spotted him in time and ordered the police below to shoot at anyone they saw on the roof. After that a couple of pretty girls wanted to have a peep at the body and offered me a bottle of wine. I snatched the bottle and drove them away. There it is in the corner; I'll wager the curious sediment at the bottom is not beeswing."

Bertillon halted on the threshold and, opening his notebook, made a rough sketch of the premises.

"No electric light nor gas," he murmured. "That's lucky: those lampglasses will show fingerprints, and so will that water-bottle. No signs of a struggle, so the fellow was probably struck down from behind, whilst standing. Obviously he had only just entered, since he still wore a cap. The skull was fractured at the first blow, from which we may infer that the murderer was a powerful man and an expert at that kind of thing. The feather cushion on the chair by the window is crushed flat; someone sat there and held the victim's attention, to give the assassin his opportunity. The accomplice chose that seat deliberately because it faced the door and because there is a mirror on each wall. Therefore the crime had been planned in advance."

Whilst speaking, Bertillon's eyes roved around the room, scrutinizing every detail. Suddenly he gave an exclamation and strode to a couch. Half concealed by the valance stood a wooden trunk and near the lock were several ugly stains, undoubtedly dry blood. Bertillon stooped and, drawing the box into full view, lifted the lid.

"Good lord, more maps!" Bannister cried, peering over my shoulder. "And blood on them!"

"Fingerprints," I replied, "and pretty clear. They will be useful."

My chief was now searching the dead man's pockets. They contained a knife, tobacco, and various unimportant odds and ends.

"This is the young man who bargained with Ambroise Dugas," he remarked, holding up a printed slip with the address of the bookshop, under which had been written in pencil, "*Thursday afternoon.*"

"That is when he should have returned to get the specimens old Dugas was collecting for him." Whilst speaking, Bertillon had picked up the victim's cap. It was stiff with dry blood, and had obviously fallen off when he collapsed. My chief examined it curiously a moment, then, drawing a penknife, ripped away the lining, exposing a folded sheet of grey-blue glossy tracing-paper. He at once spread it flat on the table whilst we eagerly crowded near.

"This is what the murderers were after, and because they failed to find it they were about to drive with the news to their leader, when Rousseau pounced on them. But what it means I cannot tell. Only a cross in red ink near the middle and three lines of meaningless letters at the bottom. Stay—there is a hole in the centre and two pencilled diagonal lines." Bertillon's breath hissed sharply. "At last I see daylight. This is a stencil, and the cross will indicate a town or village when it is pinned to the right map and slowly made to rotate. It must be the key to some very important secret. Now I understand why map after map was tried. Evidently the man who invented this queer memorandum is dead, and the gang have no idea which map it fits. That cryptic note, '*There are no elephants in Algiers*' signifies, 'It is no use trying maps of North Africa.' What a curious puzzle! Why elephants? Is it a treasure of ivory, I wonder? These letters are probably a cipher; if so, we shall decode it. The most urgent thing for the moment is to identify the fingerprints on the box and the maps. See if there are any on the bottle and lampglasses, and

test every polished surface in the room. You must remain on guard, Rousseau—no one must know we have found this thing. Put a couple of stitches in that lining and place the cap on the floor again, so that if anyone peeps into the room they will think nothing has been touched. Dufresne must superintend the usual enquiries among the neighbours. I am anxious to get to work on this secret writing."

I too was eager to learn what the result would be ; it seemed as though at last a glimmering of the meaning behind this queer sequence of events was beginning to emerge from chaos. Hurriedly packing trunk and glasses for transport, I drove to the laboratory, where Bertillon joined me soon after. Flinging his coat on a chair, he at once spread the paper stencil on a white surface and examined it attentively.

"Why, there is a crude pencil-sketch in the corner," he exclaimed. "An elephant's foot beyond a doubt. Look!" and he passed me a magnifying-glass. "Not badly drawn, either. Well, let us see what system of cryptography has been used." Seizing a pen, he copied the jumble of letters. "We may take it that the language is French. Fortunately, the message is long, so that characteristic groupings may reoccur more than once."

"It looks very complex," I remarked, and indeed at first sight the task seemed hopeless. The cipher had been written without a single division, thus :

SDNLSTTTNARYTPNUMEAEEAERHRSSHUOTTSDPONISIIIE  
TREANMLSENLUUEEGESSHEHIKTRTTHTTHIENOTTNRGBEO  
RUOTNMHPELISIEW

"I do not think a keyword has been used," my chief said after a moment. The repetition of *e* and *t*, in groupings of three, prove it to be a simple transposition. In other words, the sentence has been broken up into several lines written one below the other and then copied vertically. Generally the man who uses such a method tries to complicate matters by first writing backwards. There are one hundred and two letters, so allowing five to a line—no—six—seven . . . I have it—listen :



*"When the mid-September sun is setting, its last rays strike neither lion, tiger, nor man, but the stone under the elephant's foot."*

"Well, I'm hanged! What a crazy message—yet it has a meaning." And Bertillon frowned thoughtfully, "Mid-September—to-day is the tenth. That explains why the murder and burglary were committed the same night. Evidently the criminals have an inkling of the truth and know that the critical moment is near. Something is hidden under the stone obviously—and the elephant alluded to cannot be a living one, since it remains always in the same place. An idol or temple figure. That explains the maps of India and China. I doubt, however, that the men know an idol is meant. The words on that torn map were, '*There are no elephants in Algiers*'. Did they refer to living elephants or statues? H—m—m, we are no nearer the true solution than before. We too must first discover the map from which this stencil was made—unless the identity of the men concerned can help us. You have sent that trunk, the bottle and lampglasses to the laboratory? Very well, prepare transfers of the marks on them, and take them to Saulnier at the fingerprint department."

It was evening before I had completed my task and enlarged the numerous lines and whorls discovered. Fortunately, the chart to which they belonged was soon found, and, hurriedly making a bundle of my photographs, I ran to Bertillon's office, certain of the effect these and the criminal's name would produce. Rousseau and Dufresne were conferring excitedly by the window, whilst my old friend Bannister, who could not make up his mind to return to New York, was bending over the sheet of tracing-paper which Bertillon had pinned to a small map.

With apparent unconcern I laid a yellow identity chart on the table. Bannister gave one look and rapped out a fierce oath, which caused my colleagues by the window to swing round in haste:

"Jules Lebel, the Ghoul," Bertillon said quietly, but I saw that the hand which held the chart trembled.

"The bloodstains on the box were made by his left hand,

and the fingerprints on the lampglass are from the right hand, naturally. Well, that explains much. When we rounded up most of the men who had worked the fraud of the 'dying men' Lebel escaped with all the gang's money, probably over two million francs. Those we did not capture would evidently try to hunt down their treacherous leader. I fancy he had first hidden it in the box, but he was tracked down and wounded, and thereupon fled from them carrying the loot with him. That would account for the bloodstains. Yet he could not have been traced to India in so short a time. Where, then, are these elephants?"

"It might be quite a small figure," Bannister interposed, "some allegorical group, such as the art dealers in Paris often exhibit."

Bertillon shook his head dubiously. "No, it is a large thing standing in an open space, and there are several elephants, otherwise the precise indication of the mid-September sun striking the elephant's foot, mentioned in the cryptogram, would be unnecessary."

"The two men Rousseau captured have been identified?" I queried. Dufresne nodded. "Of course, one is Frantz le Savant, who was only released from Fresnes last year. He is of good family, and was chief engineer on one of the Messageries Maritime boats for many years. His brother, who involved him in a gigantic swindle, was sent to Cayenne for life, but Frantz escaped with a light sentence as a first offender. The other man Rousseau caught is a Burmese *dacoit*, of whom the district superintendent in Mandalay had warned us."

"Burma," Bannister said thoughtfully, "an elephant country, with many statues of such creatures. Who is the dead man?"

"Charlot Turenne—an apache, and formerly Lebel's lieutenant."

"Well, at least, since that fiend Jules Lebel is still alive, now that we know he is mixed up in this business we shall soon find him. His abnormal bulk makes him very conspicuous, and cannot be easily disguised," Bannister said. "I too have a score chalked up against the monster, so please let me work with you."

"I think the tables have been turned, and this time the Ghoul will be glad to see us." Bertillon replied, rising. "He has tried to abscond with his pals' money, and their vengeance will be terrible. We can only set men to watch all likely haunts until we obtain further indications. Yes, come in."

A gendarme had appeared at the door, followed by a handsome swarthy girl, who looked like a Spanish gipsy.

"I would like to speak to the great Monsieur Bertillon," she said timidly, looking at each of us in turn. "My name is Antonia Canelli. I am a friend of Jules Lebel——"

"Sit down, mademoiselle," my chief said courteously. "Lebel is in trouble, *hein*?"

In answer the girl placed a tin box before him and, turning her head away, said with a shiver: "Look—this monstrous thing came by post late last night." For a moment Bertillon gazed suspiciously at the woman, but her distress was too acute to be feigned. Drawing on a pair of gloves, he prised up the lid. Inside on a layer of cotton wool were two newly severed human ears! The heavy pendulous lobes were well known to us.

"Those are Lebel's ears; I recognize them," Rousseau said in a strained voice. "He seems to be getting a taste of his own fiendish methods."

Bertillon frowned and pointed to the girl, who sat rocking to and fro with closed eyes and twitching face, obviously fighting for composure.

"You have come to tell us who is responsible for this, no doubt. We cannot sympathize with the man, but we feel sorry for you."

"Oh, I know my Jules has done wicked things," the girl suddenly cried, "but he had promised to change his ways for my sake—and now Batista, the Neapolitan dog, has him."

"Batista?" Dufresne exclaimed. "Is he back in Paris?"

The girl nodded. "Yes—it was Lebel helped Batista to escape from that awful island where the Italian police had sent him. He came to my room the other night with Marius the Cat, and told me that my Jules had stolen their money and something else—plans, I think he said. They caught him just as he was

preparing to leave France for ever. We had hoped to make a fresh start in South America, and I was to join him later. They tried in horrible inhuman ways to make him reveal where the money was hidden, but Jules refused to speak. So they came to me, believing I could tell them. Oh, the beasts—they are merciless. When I swore that I knew nothing, Batista smiled a slow cruel smile that made him look like a devil, and said :

“‘You will receive little bits of your beloved Jules every day, *ma petite*, until you tell where the stuff is hidden. If in a week from now you are still obdurate, we’ll send you his heart.’ That box proves Batista will keep his word. Please help me—I don’t know where Jules is a prisoner, and I have no idea where the money is hidden.”

“You understand, mademoiselle, that if we rescue Lebel it will only be to send him to Cayenne again.”

“I know, I know, but even that is better than—such horrors,” and she pointed at the tin box. “Batista is coming again to-night—you must follow when he leaves. My room is in the Rue aux Fours, near the Châtelet—number 34, on the fourth floor. I will place a lamp in my window as soon as it’s dark. When you see me take the lamp away you will know that Batista has come. And when he is about to go I’ll pull the blind down.”

“Is there a back door or a skylight to the roof?” Rousseau asked.

“No, but there is an alley at the rear of the house where they can leave their car, and the wall is low.”

“Very well, mademoiselle,” Dufresne interrupted, “my men shall watch for your signal and follow Batista.”

“And I may see my Jules just once before you take him away?” the girl cried pathetically.

“Yes—since you have put us on the track of two dangerous criminals. Marius is wanted for murder, and so is his Neapolitan friend.”

The girl rose with a sigh and turned to go, but at the door she paused and added in a queer, hoarse voice :

“Of course they may kill me—and Jules too ! If they do

you won't let them get away, will you?" and without waiting for an answer she ran from the room.

"What do we know about Antonia Canelli? The name sounds familiar," Dufresne asked, turning to Rousseau.

"She is the daughter of Tony Canelli, who was once a member of the Mafia. He came to Paris to get away from them, and was stabbed a year ago in a brawl. She gave us information soon after that led to the capture of several Mafiosi. I am surprised she should have become entangled with Lebel and his cronies."

"Well, our duty is to recover the stolen money Lebel has hidden, and, incidentally, to lay Batista and Marius by the heels, so take what men you need. Be careful, however: those creatures are dangerous."

"Wait a bit," Bertillon said, as we were about to go. "The postmark on the label of this box is Fontainebleau. It would be as well to instruct the *commissaire* to post one or two cycle police on the roads, with a description of the scoundrels. If anything should go wrong get in touch with Fontainebleau at once."

The Rue aux Fours, a gloomy narrow street with an unsavoury reputation, was almost deserted when we arrived, although it was barely seven, and I saw that we could not loiter long without alarming our quarry. But Rousseau had foreseen this difficulty. Whilst Bannister, Louys, and I entered a dirty tavern and ordered a meal, Rousseau apparently drowsed in our car, to which a dummy taximeter was attached. He could thus watch Antonia's window and signal to us by starting his engine as soon as Batista and his crony were with the girl. Another car had been posted near the alley at the rear, in case our quarry climbed the wall. We ate and drank slowly, acutely aware of the many suspicious glances cast in our direction. Two unpleasant hours dragged thus, but still no sign came from Rousseau. At last I could stand it no longer; a presentiment of evil oppressed me; feigning to have forgotten my tobacco, I went to the door and called to our colleague. He sagged sideways as though fast asleep, and appeared not to hear me. The girl's room, I saw, was in dark-

ness, and, thoroughly alarmed, I strode to the car and seized Rousseau by an arm. The jerk caused him to sway and collapse across the wheel ; his cap rolled to the ground and a thin pencil of blood trickled from ear to chin. An icy terror clutched at my heart at the sight.

"Rousseau," I cried wildly, forgetting our mission, "old friend, are you badly hurt?" My cry brought Louys and Bannister to the door with pale, startled faces. They wasted no time in foolish questions ; whilst I forced some brandy down the Brigadier's throat, Louys fetched water and bathed his head.

"Thank God it's only a cut," Bannister breathed. "He's coming round. Someone must have crawled to the side of the car and struck upwards."

"Hold him, then," I said quickly, seized with a spasm of fear ; and, running to the alley, I blew my whistle. No answer came, nor was there any sign of the second car, although when I raced to the corner I saw by the oil and the wheel-tracks in the road that it had waited there some time. The house we had watched had no concierge, so I immediately ran up the stairs and rapped on the door of Antonia's room. Not a sound came in answer, the door was not even shut, and, drawing my pistol, I slipped softly over the threshold. On the floor, half concealed by a tablecloth at which she had clutched, lay Antonia Canelli. Her beautiful eyes stared fixedly into space, her face was swollen and almost black, and knotted tightly about her neck was a thin silken cord. She was dead—strangled in the very act of lifting her lamp as a signal, for the glass lay shattered beside her, and a charred match was yet gripped between finger and thumb. Whilst I stood dazed by the fearsome tragedy there came a clatter of feet on the stairs and Bannister hurried in, followed by Louys and Rousseau, who had recovered sufficiently to join us. We stood, the four of us, unable for a minute to reason clearly. Then Louys leapt at me and cried :

"But the others, where are they ? I heard your whistle."

"Gone," I said dully. "Probably in the power of those devils, who must have taken them by surprise and made off with the car. Of course the poor girl was followed

to-day. They guessed we should come here, and, instead of walking into our trap, laid one for us."

The words roused Rousseau to action.

"Telephone to Fontainebleau," he cried hoarsely. "Give them the number on the car. Meanwhile I'll get through to Dufresne and tell him what's happened. Then we'll go right after them—it's lucky I took the big Delage to-night."

Ten minutes later, with set, grim face, Rousseau scattered the evil crowd that had gathered, with little concern for their rumbling curses as mudguards and hubs sent them staggering; then the big car was hurtling along the smooth road on her long run south. Mile after mile slipped by monotonously. Only once did Rousseau slow down to take a pull at his flask.

"My head still throbs," he said. "Luckily I've a thick skull. I'll bet it was Marius got me. No wonder he's known as 'the Cat'."

Midnight struck as we slid to a halt before the police station at Fontainebleau. A cyclist in uniform was waiting on the step. He at once climbed into the vacant seat beside Rousseau. "I followed their car to the 'Chute des Rochers', ten miles away in the forest," he said. "There's a large cave under the rocks. We've got six men watching the place. Monsieur Bertillon passed here not long ago and picked up our *commissaire*. I was ordered to stay to guide you."

It was an eerie drive through the gloomy forest, nor were we allowed to go far. When some six miles had been covered, the policeman held up his hand.

"We must hide the car under those bushes," he said, "and walk the rest of the way. The sound of an engine carries far at night. Besides, your chief has decided to wait for dawn. We should break our necks if we tried to climb those rocks in the dark."

We found Bertillon sitting on a boulder at the edge of a deep cleft, partly filled with a wild confusion of great stones and fallen trees.

"A bad defeat," he whispered. "I should have foreseen that a spy would probably watch the poor girl. Lebel is a prisoner in that cave."

"And our two colleagues?"

"They bound them hand and foot and left them in a ditch."

Although it was summer, the night was cold, and I for one was heartily glad when at last a grey and cheerless dawn made our advance possible.

At a sign from my chief I clambered cautiously over the rocks, pistol in hand, until far below me I could see a yawning hole in the ground. Louys and Bannister had also begun to advance, and the blue-clad police were already spreading out, when suddenly I caught a glimpse of a huge squat figure clad only in tattered shirt and drawers drag itself slowly out of the cave. Seizing the glasses Bertillon had given me, I focused them hastily. At once, with startling abruptness, a hideous face leapt into the circle of my vision; it was Jules Lebel, ghastly pale, his flesh scarred by purple weals and cuts. It hardly needed the gaping wounds below the temples, where once his ears had been, to transform the creature into a nightmare horror. But his expression fascinated me. The features worked convulsively and the bestial mouth drooled saliva, yet it was not fear, but an evil triumph blended with hope that predominated. In a flash I guessed the reason. Lebel had stunned or killed his tormentors, and was now escaping; he had cheated them after all. But, as I watched, swift terror swept over the man. He halted, listening, and so clear was the picture that I saw him shiver.

Then a frightful roar burst from his lips as without warning a group of men appeared from the rocks and flung themselves on him. For an instant I thought our police had attacked, and started to my feet. I was quickly undeceived however. There was no need for the glasses to see that a terrible apache battle was raging. Knives flashed, pistols spat redly, and vile yelping curses filled the air. Lebel had become a madman and despite the odds held his own, hurling the ruffians right and left, although he had no weapons. From all sides now our men were climbing, falling, and sliding into the valley, and at their unexpected appearance the murderous crew scattered. Stumbling blindly, Lebel staggered towards us, but he was riddled with wounds, and as I came up with him he suddenly



sagged and pitched on his face. Bertillon lifted his head and poured some spirit into his mouth and for a second this revived him. "Don't let—them—get—it," he whispered—"elephant's foot."

"Where?" I almost yelled in excitement.

His lips moved convulsively, but no sound came from them, and I thought he was gone, when with a last effort he gasped: "Taride seventy-four." Then a frightful spasm contorted the enormous body and the Ghoul was dead.

Meanwhile seven ruffians of the worst type had been captured, but Batista and Marius the Cat had vanished among the boulders. We left the hunting of these to the local *commissaire* and hurried back to our cars.

"Taride seventy-four," Bertillon suddenly cried as we entered the outskirts of Paris. "Why, that's France, the Dauphiné district. We'll have a wash and a cup of coffee, and then I'll telephone to our friend Dugas."

Soon after nine we gathered again in Bertillon's room, to which Ambroise Dugas had brought a Taride map of France, and with trembling hands I pinned the stencil to the centre and turned it, until the lines ran north and south and the cross covered a small town.

"Chambéry—near Aix-les-Bains," Bannister exclaimed incredulously. "That can't be right. What have elephants to do with Chambéry?"

"Elephants?" came in surprise from the old dealer. "I can tell you that. In the centre of Chambéry stands a beautiful fountain of mysterious origin. Four enormous bronze elephants with ivory tusks squirt water from their trunks into the fount. They face east, west——"

At that instant the door opened and Rousseau appeared dragging a gendarme by the collar and wrist.

"I saw this fellow listening at the door as I came along. Someone had left the outer padded door ajar. He ran to the big window over the forecourt and using a mirror as a heliograph signalled in Morse. I didn't quite get the message; it looked like Cham——"

"Call the captain of gendarmes," Bertillon ordered curtly, and when the officer appeared, "Do you know this man?"

In answer the captain tore the fellow's tunic open and examined the number-tab.

"This should be Jean Bobillot—but it is not—I never saw him before. Where is Bobillot?"

"Drunk, and probably fast asleep," the pseudo-gendarme replied sulkily. "It was his birthday, and when I found he couldn't move I took his place, as any friend would do."

"Put the fellow in a cell, Captain, and let no one communicate with him," our chief ordered. Then, when the prisoner had been removed, he turned to us and said: "It's going to be a race, my friends. Batista and his cronies got the message, but they don't know we know. They'll think their spy cannot get away before the evening. It's obvious they have discovered at last what to look for, and no longer need the stencil. Have the racing Mercedes ready at once and wait in the Conciergerie. These rogues have eyes everywhere. To-day is September the fifteenth; we shall be in Chambéry by sundown."

I shall never forget the thrill that plucked at my nerves as the car came to a stop before the enigmatic fountain and I gazed at the four bronze elephants. The last rays of the setting sun struck redly on a square slab just under the left foot of the huge beast that faced west. Ten minutes later Rousseau had cleverly loosened the stone and drawn a package wrapped in oiled silk from the hole it had concealed, and now at last we understood why Lebel's gang had made such desperate attempts to obtain this package. Truly there were several bundles of banknotes, but of greater worth by far were the charts and drawings, names and indications it also contained that made escape from the Cayenne prisons a simple matter. A cunningly chosen chain of escape agents, safe retreats in case of pursuit, hidden stores of weapons, food, and drugs, all the details of a perfect and masterly organization for flight, that it must have taken years to complete, had fallen into our hands.

"No wonder Batista got away," Bertillon said, laughing. "I fancy Frantz intended to help his brother by the same method. Even Noumea and the Andamman islands are included, which explains the presence of the *dacoit*. Well, the

mystery of the maps is a mystery no longer—yet if Morel had not reported the quarrel over a map at “La Mere l’Oie”, we might never have got at the truth. And now to set a trap for those who are coming to get this, convinced that they will arrive in time.”

Bertillon was not mistaken: the same night Batista and Marius the Cat were caught as they were climbing to the ledge beneath the elephant’s foot.

**EPISODE VI**  
**THE SHADOW ON THE BLIND**



## THE SHADOW ON THE BLIND

DR. COLOMBANI, the Italian fingerprint expert, was decidedly hostile, and his little animal eyes gleamed aggressively as Bertillon explained in detail the intricacies of the verbal portrait, which made identification so swift and infallible.

"Features are superficial and easily changed, *caro signore*," the doctor at last interrupted explosively. "In France you probably have not to combat such subtle brains as we of the Italian Questura encounter. *Our* criminals are past masters at disguise, and your system would fail in every case. Fingerprints, and fingerprints only, can be relied upon, and a close collaboration between your department and mine will not become possible until you adopt our methods."

"Fingerprints are excellent," Bertillon replied gently, "when you can get them, but you cannot step up to a man you suspect in public and request him to give you the impression of his hands. Moreover, fingerprints are quite useless if the wanted man has never been arrested and his chart, therefore, is not in the records. I fancy that here is a case in point," and he drew a letter from a pile of documents before him. "This is from a girl, Madeleine Moreau, an artist's model. She posed for the famous picture 'Diana at the Spring' that triumphed at this year's Salon. Mademoiselle Moreau is coming this afternoon at four to consult me. It seems her sweetheart, Jules Brignolles, has vanished since winning the Circuit of France cycle race."

"Jules Brignolles?" Chief Inspector Rousseau exclaimed. "Why, that's impossible. I saw him come in by the Neuilly gate escorted by a crowd of admirers. He is now at his training camp."

"I know that," my chief retorted with a smile; "but the letter suggests that a substitution has taken place. By the

way, was the fellow not involved in some shady business several months ago? Look up his record, Rousseau, and let me have it at once; the girl will be here any minute now—hurry, please!”

“I do not see——” the Italian expert was beginning irritably, but our chief held up his hand :

“Wait, please, Doctor. There is the signal announcing the young lady,” and a crystal globe on Bertillon’s desk glowed brightly. “It is not that I am stubborn, nor unnecessarily vain of a system which it has taken some years to evolve, but it would be well if you were convinced that fingerprints, unsupported by other evidence, are *not* infallible. Well, Rousseau?” as our colleague returned with a chart.

“A queer case this, monsieur, which caused Brignolles to be arrested. A bank official was waylaid and robbed in June last year in a novel manner. Just as he had turned into a deserted lane leading to his house a man dressed in striped jersey and knickers suddenly swept up on a racing-cycle, knocked him down with a swinging blow from a cudgel, seized a bag containing fifteen thousand francs in gold and notes, which the cashier was in the habit of taking once a week to the local mayor, and disappeared as swiftly and silently as he had come. It was the last day of the annual race, curiously enough, and the bank official declared that the robber was Jules Brignolles, whose picture had appeared in all the papers. The famous cyclist was detained two days, but so many people had seen him at his training-quarters at the time the aggression took place that it was obvious he could not have committed it.”

“Good—since he was arrested we have his photograph,” Bertillon exclaimed, “and his fingerprints,” he added, glancing at the Italian with a glint of amusement. “Bring the girl in now—this promises to be interesting.”

As my old friend Inspector Louys threw the door wide a pretty young girl stood framed in the opening.

“Monsieur Bertillon?” she queried in a timid voice. “I thought—I had hoped . . .”

“Come in, mademoiselle,” my chief exclaimed cheerfully, rising and moving a chair so that the light from the window



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1 THE TRACE ON THE BOTTLE, AROUND WHICH A CIRCLE HAS BEEN DRAWN, AND WHICH, WHEN ENLARGED (2) APPEARED TO BE A PERFECT FINGER-PRINT, BUT WHICH (3) WAS IN REALITY PRODUCED BY THE OUTER EDGE OF A HAND. ONLY THE PERFECT INSTRUMENTS OF THE SÛRETÉ LABORATORIES REVEALED THIS DANGEROUS SIMILARITY

4 THE TWO EARS, SHOWING THE TREMENDOUS DIFFERENCE WHEN PUT SIDE BY SIDE





would fall on her face. "You find us in conclave because your letter has whetted our curiosity. These are my colleagues, so you may speak without reserve. How long have you known Jules Brignolles, and what has happened?"

"I first met Jules at the house of a friend about six months ago—just after the Ardennes circuit. We fell in love with each other, and I promised to marry him as soon as his means would permit it. I did not see him very often—the firm whose cycles his races advertise, constantly sent him abroad. Much depended on this last circuit, for if he won we should be able to buy the little house we had chosen at St. Cloud, and I naturally followed his progress from day to day with anxiety. To my surprise I received a letter three days ago from Clermont-Ferrant, the last lap before Paris, asking me not to meet him on his arrival. It was vague: he would be so tired and dusty, and—oh, a lot of silly reasons to which no girl would pay any attention. However, since he promised to come to my rooms later, I hired a cab and with some friends watched the finish of the race from a distance. It was wonderful. I felt so proud of my Jules—he was first, as you know. To my surprise and disappointment he didn't come as agreed, although I waited until midnight. My mother had prepared a little dinner, and his apparent neglect made me very unhappy. Early the next morning—yesterday, that was—I hurried to his training-camp. The man I saw there resembled my Jules indeed—but he was a stranger. I am afraid I became angry, because everyone assured me this stranger was Monsieur Brignolles, and made fun of me. So in despair I wrote to you. You once helped my uncle when the police would have arrested him—Jacques Moreau, do you remember? Jules had betted heavily on his own success, and, together with the prize money, must have had a very large sum in his possession. I fear something has happened to him," and the girl stopped, breathless from her hurried, eager recital, tears trembling on her beautiful lashes.

"You have probably a photograph of your sweetheart?" Bertillon queried. "Good—let me see it. Now tell me, who introduced him to you?"

"Oh—I forget—no—it was a girl friend. Why do you ask?"

Bertillon waved the question aside. "Have you ever been with him at a public gathering, a race or some such thing, where others addressed him by name? In fact, to put it bluntly, what proof have you that your sweetheart was truly the famous cyclist?"

"Why, monsieur," the girl cried, startled, "his picture is in all the papers! I've seen it dozens of times, and he showed me letters, offers from other firms."

"Yes, but newspaper pictures are not very clear; you admitted just now that this stranger resembled the man you have known as Brignolles. Now look at this—who is it?" and Bertillon covered the police chart Rousseau had brought with a piece of paper, so that only the profile portrait remained visible.

"That is my fiancé," the girl cried vehemently—then, on a falling note, "At least—yes, I am sure. Do you mean the man I love lied, that he is not——?"

"Did you ever notice his ears?" my chief continued, ignoring the question. "Are they big—small? Is the lobe detached? In short, is this his ear?" and he quickly cut a small hole in a sheet of paper and laid it over the portrait, covering all but that organ.

"I cannot tell," the girl said in a low voice, and I saw she was deadly pale, "the picture is too small, but I do not think it is: Jules had ears like a girl. I remember teasing him once; I said he should have them pierced for earrings. What does it mean, monsieur?"

"You must give me time to investigate, mademoiselle," Bertillon answered gently. "Meanwhile, do not worry. I promise to communicate with you to-morrow without fail. Give me your word, however, not to mention this matter to anyone."

"And if my fiancé should come?"

"Why, then all will be well; you'll no longer need my help," Bertillon replied with assumed lightness as he conducted the girl to the door.

When she had gone he turned swiftly to me and said, "Take these two pictures to the camera room. I want enlarged photographs of the ears. Hurry, please—we'll wait here."

Although I used every artifice known to me, an hour passed before I returned with the two prints, hastily blotted and still damp. Something about the frozen expression on every face as I entered my chief's room caused me to halt in the act of placing the photographs before him. I saw then that a gendarme, hot, dusty and breathless, stood near the window, mopping his face and wiping the lining of his cap.

"Well," Bertillon said, a hard ring in his voice, "any difference?"

"The two extremes, no resemblance whatever," I replied. Bertillon studied the prints a moment, then without a word handed them to Dr. Colombani and, rising, said crisply. "A murder has been committed at Choisy-le-Roi, and the real or the false Brignolles involved. A car is already waiting; we'll go there at once. Those photographs will be invaluable; bring the portraits from which you copied them also," he added turning to me. "Now, doctor, we'll see which proves the more useful, fingerprints or my method."

During the drive to the pleasant summer resort, Rousseau gave me a brief outline of the news the gendarme had brought.

"The victim is a woman, Madame Gisèle Lemaire. She was once a dancer at the Folies-Bergères. A handsome creature, *mon vieux*; the men were all crazy about her. She married the richest, Oswald Lemaire, the company promoter, and when he died a year later you'd have thought she'd have settled down to enjoy life. *Ah non*—quite the reverse. She was mad for more money. Money for its own sake, I mean. Not to spend it, like most women, but to hoard it up and gloat over the chink of gold and the crisp feel of new banknotes. So she became a moneylender, a usurer. It was in the blood, I expect—her father ran a crooked gambling-hell. Her rate of interest was abominable, and her ruthless action when notes of hand fell due and were not paid has caused more than one suicide. We have known of her for some time, because she was not averse to a bit of blackmail by all accounts, but she managed to steer just within the law. Her house, the Villa des Tilleuls, is in the nature of a stronghold. Massive doors,

barred windows, and a high wall with broken glass on top. Her beastly business made it necessary she should live alone—although I'll bet she knew the dangers of that. Her end does not surprise me. Rumour has it that her dashing charms and her money attracted many strange lovers. This morning the housekeeper, who did not live on the premises, but had a key, found the front door still bolted when she arrived. There is a little wicket—a judas—in that door, through which Madame Lemaire took stock of her visitors before admitting them ; this stood wide open, so when the servant found she could not get in she not only rang peal after peal, but shouted through the judas. Alarmed at the unusual silence, she at once fetched a gendarme, and together they entered through a back door—which was not fastened. They found Madame Lemaire sprawling on the carpet of her boudoir on the first floor. She had been stabbed, and was quite dead. Thereupon the gendarme very wisely touched nothing, remaining on guard, whilst the housekeeper ran to the police station for assistance. Now comes the queer part of this business. When the *commissaire* made a perfunctory search of the house he discovered the body of a young man dressed in grey jersey and cycling-knickers lying in the bedroom adjoining the boudoir. This unexpected complication caused him to send for the chief."

"But Bertillon said something about Brignolles or the other man being involved !" I exclaimed.

"Of course ; the dead man is either the famous cyclist or the fellow who was to marry Mademoiselle Moreau."

"That's why I told you to bring those portraits," Bertillon, who had overheard our conversation, remarked, turning half round. "Here we are. Stop the car at the corner, Louys, and make sure that police guard all approaches ; I wish to form a general impression first."

Little could be seen of the villa, which stood in a large garden on the corner of a broad but sparsely inhabited avenue. It was screened on the one side by spreading trees, and on the other, facing a country lane, by a high wall. The gates too, were protected by unusually thick sheet iron. The *commissaire*

and the captain of gendarmes were eager to recount what they had found, but before questioning them Bertillon examined the lane and the wall ; then he approached the main entrance with quick, alert steps.

"Were these gates open, do you know, when the servant came ?" he queried after a cursory greeting.

"No, I questioned the servant on that point, but she has a key," the *commissaire* replied. "Nothing has been touched, monsieur. The doctor I summoned merely assured himself that both man and woman were beyond help. We even left the blind down as it was, and switched on the electric light to search the house."

"Then the light was not burning in the room where the crime was committed ?"

"No, monsieur . . ." Then hesitatingly, "Partout"—this to the gendarme who had accompanied us : "you were the first to enter the bedroom. Was the light burning ?"

"No, it was not, sir. But the door was ajar, so I switched on my pocket lamp to avoid treading on anything on the floor. The room was very dark."

"How did the man die ?" Bertillon questioned further.

"Poison, the doctor says, a violent poison that killed almost instantly. Some preparation of mercury cyanide."

"Then it was not he switched off the light. That points to another, the murderer probably, and a cool customer used to crime, I should say. How did these two enter—any indications ?"

"Yes, the back door, which was neither bolted nor locked when the officer examined it, has holes drilled around the bolts, a wire was probably inserted to draw them back ; the lock was then picked."

"So—it would seem, then, that the dead man was not an accomplice, since he had no need to break in. Very well, please wait here," and, beckoning to me, Bertillon entered the garden. An evil atmosphere emanated from the house, due no doubt to the ugly barred windows and nail-studded door, to which an open wicket gave the finishing touch. It might have been the portal of a prison or an asylum. Skirting the flower-

beds and gravel path, we soon arrived at the rear entrance, where it was evident at once that a forced entry had been made by a skilled burglar.

"Too many holes—the fellow did not know the position of the bolts," Bertillon remarked thoughtfully. "Well, come along, we'll go upstairs now."

Broad carpeted stairs led to the first floor, where a policeman stood on duty. The stained-glass window allowed little light to enter the passage, and the two rooms, a boudoir and a bedroom, where the bodies lay, were very dark. My chief pressed a switch on the wall, then he pointed to the windows. "The shutters to the front are locked, we'll leave them so, but you may release that blind ; we shall see well enough then."

As the cream-coloured blind snapped up I had my first glimpse of this room of grim tragedy. On a small table in the centre stood an empty wine-bottle, a decanter half full of cognac, and a plate of biscuits. An overturned wineglass lay on the edge of this plate, whilst a second glass had fallen or had been thrown to the floor and broken. A struggle had probably taken place near the window, where a chair had been overturned and broken. Then I noticed that a curtain had been torn from its rings, and the full horror of the scene that had been enacted the preceding night burst on me. Half concealed by the heavy folds of this curtain, which was still gripped in her hands, lay Madame Lemaire. Her handsome, swarthy face was terribly distorted, and the brown stain on her silken gown, as also the pool of dry blood by her side, showed that the assassin's knife must have pierced the heart. Her long, black, lustrous hair, twisted in sinuous coils about her body, made a sombre frame to this grim picture.

Whilst Bertillon examined the boudoir with electric lamp and lenses, measuring and scribbling in his famous notebook, I tiptoed to the bedroom. I knew what to expect, yet a shudder shook my nerves as I focused the beam from my torch on the bed, and saw, crouching on the floor and clutching the sheet, on which his hand had left a crimson stain, a broad-shouldered, strongly built youth. His face rested against the mattress, and a glance at his ears showed me that this was

indeed poor Madeleine Moreau's sweetheart and not the famous Brignolles. Whilst I stood there, vainly trying to understand what had happened, my chief joined me. Ignoring the body, he pointed to some smudges on the fawn-coloured carpet.

"That fellow was admitted by the woman ; she knew him—expected him probably—hence the open wicket of the big door. They were drinking and making merry when the murderer came ; but what happened thereafter is still a puzzle. Apparently this young fellow stood calmly by whilst his sweetheart was stabbed, and then actually drank poison from that glass on the floor. The fragments reek of mercury cyanide. I can visualize his gasp of horror as the first pangs of approaching dissolution seized him and the glass dropped from his nerveless fingers ; an instant later he staggered blindly to the bed and collapsed—dead."

"How do you know the woman was killed first ?" I asked in surprise.

"Because the blood on his hand is the woman's, and those smudges his feet made on the carpet are her blood also. He probably caught her as she fell—and thus stained his hands and shoes. Then perhaps there was a quarrel with the assassin—no, hardly a quarrel, or he would not afterwards have hobnobbed with the fellow and thus swallowed the poisoned wine. Well, first the motive ; we may take it only three need be considered : jealousy, greed, or revenge. Get busy with your camera ; I'll see meanwhile if there are any signs of a robbery."

Hardly had I completed my work when Bertillon came back and, sitting down at the table, began to write. I waited in silence until he looked up with a grim smile.

"Listen to this," he began. "See if you can pick any holes in it. Wait—you'd better call Dr. Colombani, Rousseau, and the *commissaire* ; they may have their points of view also."

All three were impatiently pacing up and down in the corridor, and needed no second bidding. When they were seated, Bertillon began to read slowly. "This woman," he said, "was a moneylender, and not averse to cruelly squeezing her victims. Here is a letter signed Alphonse D. which got



caught by the edge of the drawer in which she kept loose receipts and pushed into the tiny space behind. This Alphonse was here yesterday, and is probably the unknown assassin. She was apparently pressing him for payment, had threatened to write to his employers, and he had promised to come last night after dark with the money. The letter is that of a frightened, but not necessarily weak or timid, man. The fellow in the jersey arrived before this Alphonse, however, about nine, I fancy, because the servant leaves at eight generally and Madame Lemaire had dined alone—the remains of the meal are in the kitchen. He rang the door bell, which proves the gate had been left unlocked, and she thereupon peeped through the judas, admitted him, conducted him to her boudoir, and placed wine, cognac, and biscuits on the table.

“That in itself shows that the first visitor was not Alphonse, because she would have received him in the office downstairs. She was not the type to mix business with sentiment. She and her friend had time to empty half the decanter, but curiously enough the liqueur glasses from which they drank are not here. The post-mortem will show if they also drank some wine. So far we are stating facts—now begins the mystery. Either Alphonse or someone else came later and climbed over the wall—why? Because obviously the gate had meanwhile been locked. In doing so he cut his hand on the fringe of glass. I have found traces of blood on a jagged point and deeply marked footprints in the garden where he jumped down. The wall is eight feet high, so he was an athletic fellow. He tiptoed across the garden, forced the back door, crept upstairs, surprised the couple in the boudoir, and killed first the woman and then the man. Some time elapsed between the two crimes, because the fellow in the jersey opened drawers and cupboards, collected money and jewellery, how much I cannot say, whilst the murderer sat here and calmly smoked a cigarette, with the poisoned wine ready to hand. He is a formidable creature who takes no chances. The dead man’s fingerprints are plentiful, but those of the unknown nowhere to be found, except one single imprint on the bottle. Notice anything queer about that bottle, by the way, Rousseau?”

My colleague examined it long and thoughtfully and finally smelled it. "Why, it reeks of petrol!" he cried.

"More than that—motor spirit," Bertillon retorted. "He wiped bottle and glasses with a piece of linen steeped in a benzol mixture in the hope of obliterating all fingerprints, which proves he didn't wear gloves. Motor spirit suggests a car, or at least access to a car. It's that poison worries me! How can an ordinary man get hold of mercury cyanide? Well, this is how I read the problem: The cyclist in the jersey and the murderer were accomplices. Probably he was to leave gate and door open, but with her usual caution the woman went the rounds after admitting her friend, thus compelling the unknown to break in. His crime committed, and money and jewellery collected, he poisoned his pal as a precautionary measure"—and Bertillon laughed harshly—"and then decamped. He is, I should say, broad-shouldered, tall, resolute, dark, bearded, age under forty, and wore a suit of navy-blue tweed. Oh yes, he also went to the kitchen, drank a glass of water, and cleaned his knife on a piece of the *Journal* two days old. He ignited this paper and threw it in the sink, a silly thing to do, for the blood from the blade and some water in the sink extinguished the flame; he should have soaked it in the benzol he carried."

During this long monologue the *commissaire's* eyes had been growing bigger and bigger; now he wiped his brow mechanically and said:

"You are sure of all this, monsieur? I had come to a totally different conclusion."

"Go on," Bertillon prompted, seeing he hesitated. "That is why I called you—I am not infallible."

"Well, the letter from this Alphonse shows she expected him to come with money. Hence the open gate and the unlatched judas. When he had paid her she may have invited him to a friendly drink. Meanwhile that fellow in the jersey, who probably knew the woman's habits, forced the door, and, when Alphonse had gone suddenly, came in and tried to rob her. She struggled so much, however, that he killed her, whereupon, horrified at what he had done, he committed suicide."

"Very well, monsieur," my chief said soberly, "let us suppose that is what occurred. Then why did he wipe the bottle, although his fingerprints are on cupboards and drawers? Where is the knife? Where are money and jewellery?—for all the jewel cases are empty. Where do the navy-blue threads come from I found on the wall, since his clothes are grey? From whose beard is the hair under the woman's thumbnail? And how is it the footprints in the garden were made by boots, whilst he is wearing rubber-soled shoes? No, sir! There was a third—the real criminal. Your business now is to find the mysterious Alphonse and to identify the dead man. He has certainly a black record, for without a doubt it was he waylaid and robbed that bank cashier a year ago. He has been impersonating Jules Brignolles for a long time," and Bertillon gave the *commissaire* a résumé of Madeleine Moreau's story.

"We have identified him as the same man by his ears," and he glanced slyly at the Italian expert, who until now had followed the investigation in complete silence. "Perhaps Madame Lemaire also believed him to be the famous cyclist. Please leave gendarmes on guard with strict orders to prevent anyone from entering the lane at the back of the garden. I may be compelled to make a more thorough examination of the ground and wall."

"Perhaps you would be so good, monsieur, as to allow one of your inspectors to assist me?"

"Certainly; Rousseau will find this Alphonse if anyone can. I shall also set a watch on all receivers known to us. Please let me have as complete a list of the dead woman's jewellery as you can. The names of the firms on the jewel cases should be sufficient for that, and the servant will be useful."

The rest of the afternoon and the next day I was busy in the laboratory preparing plaster casts of the footprints and photographic enlargements of the various traces. Last of all I examined the hair Bertillon had found under Mme. Lemaire's thumbnail. The result was so startling that I carried microscope and slide to my chief's office at once. Rousseau was with him, and had evidently just made his report. At sight of my instrument Bertillon raised his eyebrows.

"This is not a human hair at all," I blurted out ; "it's from a cat !"

He studied my slide a moment, then nodded thoughtfully.

"Quite right, a cat's hair it is, and I find that Madame Lemaire kept a cat as a pet. Yet, strangely enough, Decauville has actually a black beard."

"Decauville ?" I queried.

"Of course—I forgot. The man who wrote that letter signed Alphonse D. is a bank cashier named Decauville. Rousseau has a warrant ; go along if you like. Louys will accompany you ; search his rooms, and then bring him here at once. Don't question him or tell him anything."

Stopping only long enough to take a portable case of instruments, I hurried after my colleagues. During the drive to Neuilly, where the fellow resided, Rousseau gave me an outline of his investigation.

"Nothing simpler, *mon vieux*," he said with a chuckle—"just luck ! The papers reported the crime, and this morning we had three visitors : a postman, who, when returning home two nights ago about ten o'clock, saw a tall, bearded man emerge from the lane behind the villa. The fellow reeled drunkenly, stopped twice with his hand pressed to his heart, and finally disappeared at the corner where the electric cars pass through the main avenue. A little later a conductor reported that a bearded man, dreadfully pale and dishevelled, had boarded his car at five minutes past ten at that corner. He had noticed that the man's hand was bandaged with a blood-stained rag. Our third visitor was a waiter from a café in the Rue des Carmes. He related that on that same evening a dark man with a bandaged hand had come in about eleven and ordered a glass of cognac. Instead of one, he gulped three, one after the other. This and the customer's pallor and agitation had struck the waiter, the more so because he had pulled a wallet stuffed with banknotes from his pocket when paying. His manner and appearance were so strange that the waiter remarked jokingly to the cashier, 'That fellow looks as though he has just committed a crime.' I thus obtained a good description of our quarry, and, since the letter

signed Alphonse had been posted in the Rue des Carmes, I just went from house to house and chatted with the servants and concierges. Here we are, number ninety-five."

"But the beard is a fluke," I objected ; "it was a cat's hair !"

"I know—still, such freakish coincidences do happen. I'll just find out if he is in, if not we'll sit in that café opposite and wait."

Our quarry was not at home, and it was midnight before a cab stopped outside the house and he got out. We let him pay the driver and then quickly closed round, for he looked as though he might show fight. But at sight of our grim faces he recoiled and would have fallen had it not been for my grip on his arm.

"I had nothing to do with it—I swear !" he gasped.

"With what ?" Rousseau snapped. "We've not said a word."

"Oh, I know, I know—that terrible shadow on the blind was no delusion."

"H—m—m, you evidently know all about it. First we'll search your rooms, and then you must come to headquarters."

For an instant I thought there would be a tussle, although I'd already passed my hand over his pockets and taken a small pistol he carried, but with sudden resignation he made a gesture of assent and allowed himself to be handcuffed and led upstairs. He occupied a small, comfortable flat, and was evidently a keen sportsman, for on the walls were many fine heads of deer. We were not surprised therefore to discover a cupboard well stocked with guns. In a corner under a heap of clothing was a heavy hunting-knife still stained crimson near the haft, although the blade had been recently wiped. Our prisoner watched Rousseau pack this knife with a visible shudder, but made no remark. I perceived that his agitation grew as we examined his wardrobe, and when I dragged out a suit of navy blue serge he started up with a strangled cry. "No, no, that is not the suit I wore on the night—" his voice trailed away to a hoarse whisper—"the night Madame Lemaire was killed. Those are the clothes," and he pointed at the untidy heap under which the knife had been concealed. Rous-

seau looked pityingly at the man and shrugged his shoulders.

"You seem bent on committing yourself. Since you have admitted so much, why not confess? It will save you much trouble."

"Confess?—I've nothing to confess."

"*Bien*—the *juge* will know how to deal with you."

Meanwhile we had examined and made a bundle of the prisoner's papers and money, nearly ten thousand francs, and, leaving Louys to affix seals to the doors and windows, we conducted Decauville to the Sûreté.

Early the next morning he was brought to my department and his fingerprints taken, and afterwards two gendarmes conducted him to Bertillon's office, where Dufresne, the Sûreté chief, and Dr. Colombani were already waiting. A night in the cells had not improved Decauville's appearance, and his truculent manner and wildly glaring eyes caused Dufresne to signal to the police that they should wait outside the door. I had, however, spent a busy night with my instruments, and had made several discoveries that appeared to me significant. No doubt my haggard face and red-rimmed eyes gave Bertillon an inkling of my nocturnal activities, and I read a question in his gaze, whereat I smiled and tapped the bulky reports under my arm, at the same time glancing meaningly at Dr. Colombani, who was triumphantly comparing the prisoner's chart with the fingerprints found on the bottle. Upon this a fleeting smile also passed over Bertillon's expressive face.

"Now, Alphonse Decauville, if you prefer it, we will first hear your story," Dufresne began. "Remember, we are not prejudiced. Our ideal is truth, and we shall gladly liberate you if you are innocent. Lie to us and you will find us ruthless."

A moment the wretched man studied each one of us in turn, then without preamble began to speak in a low but steady voice: "I owed Madame Lemaire a large sum. I had been foolish; games of chance fascinate me, and I gambled with money not my own. It had to be paid back, and so I fell into the woman's clutches. She was absolutely without pity, for she soon discovered that a breath of suspicion would have ruined me. I have already paid back more than the original sum in

interest, and at last there came a time when I could pay no more, so she threatened to call on the directors of the bank where I work. There was nothing for it but to try my luck for the last time at the roulette tables, and, if I lost, to shoot myself. Fortunately I won enough to clear off my debt entirely. I made an appointment after dark, because the neighbours know well on what errands men like myself go to the villa. Usually the gate was left open for me, but this time it was locked, and there is no bell. Since a light shone from a window at the back, I made a running leap and drew myself level with the top of the wall, hoping to attract attention by shouting. Failing that, I was determined to climb over. Hardly had I shouted once, when I perceived suddenly a huge black shadow on the blind, which quickly resolved itself into two struggling figures. Even as I stared, not as yet realizing what this might mean, I saw a blow struck, a horrible, shrill scream reached me, and one of the figures seemed to crumple. Again a wild, gurgling yell split the silence, and the fearful sound caused the cold sweat of horror to trickle down my face. I let go my hold, cutting my wrist on a jagged point of glass, fell clumsily to the ground, and without a backward glance ran madly down the lane to the main avenue, where I boarded a street car and came home. I daresay those who saw me thought I was mad: I had lost my hat, and my clothes were covered with dust and cement from the wall. The next day I read of the double murder in the papers and knew I had actually seen the woman stabbed."

"You expect us to believe that?" Dufresne said sharply. "You admit the woman was blackmailing you; you went to her house; you cannot prove whence your money came; and you had a bloodstained knife hidden in a cupboard, just such a weapon as the murderer used . . ."

He paused as Dr. Colombani bent down and said something in a low voice, pointing to the fingerprint chart. Dufresne nodded and concluded abruptly: "And, last, damning proof against you, a fingerprint found on the wine-bottle in the boudoir corresponds exactly to the official print of your middle finger. That, taken in conjunction with the fact that you were

undoubtedly at the Villa des Tilleuls at the time the murder was committed, is evidence enough for any jury."

"You see, signor expert," Dr. Colombani exclaimed, "fingerprints cannot lie—they are infallible. How could that print be on the bottle if this man did not enter the house?"

"Do you agree?" Bertillon said to me with a glance at my dossiers.

"The doctor is quite right," I answered; "it would be definite proof if it were a fingerprint, but it isn't."

"What, not a fingerprint?" my chief cried excitedly.

"No, sir; if you examine these enlargements you will see that this is a unique case. Anyone might be deceived. It was made by the outer edge of the murderer's hand, and by a freak the mark is shaped like a fingerprint. Here, however, is the complete impression, and it belongs neither to the dead man, Madame Lemaire, nor to Decauville. But there is more, much more"—and I looked at my chief.

"Go on—tell us," he said briefly.

"For what did you use your knife within the last week, and with what did you wipe the blade?" I asked, turning to Decauville.

"I shot and skinned a hare a few days ago, and I think—yes, I wiped the knife on my handkerchief."

"Quite true; the blood on the haft is not human, but from a rodent. Fortunately, we know the murderer cleaned his weapon on a newspaper, and since every blade, no matter how keen the edge, tears microscopic particles from the material on which it is wiped, it was not a difficult task to discover whether Decauville had used a newspaper or a cloth. Calcium nitrate dyes wood-pulp yellow, whereas cotton filaments assume a delicate pink shade. These two colours react quite differently when photographed. I at once made a test, and the ultra-micro-camera revealed traces of cotton. Furthermore, the plaster cast of the footprints in the garden prove they were made by a man who had recently driven a motor-car. Here is a micro-photograph of the characteristic '*cambrouis*', that mixture of motor oil, carbon, and metal, which every motorist collects on his boots and clothes. There is no



sign of '*cambouis*' on Decauville's boots, nor have they the stains and scratches that driving a car always produces. There were shreds of blue tweed on the glass fringe of the wall, but the prisoner's blue suit is new, whilst the *grey* suit he avers he wore on the night of the crime has characteristic dust from the wall surrounding the Villa on the waistband, vest, and sleeves, but no sign of it on the trousers. I need not point out that it would inevitably be there had he climbed over the wall instead of merely drawing himself up by his hands. There is one more point. We found no trace of tobacco in his pockets, nor anything in his rooms that would show he smokes."

"I do not smoke," Decauville interrupted; "I have never formed the habit."

"I thought not; yet the murderer smoked a cigarette whilst waiting to poison his accomplice."

Bertillon laughed grimly. "What do you say now, Doctor Colombani? Are our methods so bad? I am also convinced the unknown assassin came in a car, for I saw the marks of his wheels. The vehicle had three new Michelin tyres and one old, worn-out Dunlop. It was left in the lane, without lights, whilst he was in the house. He had backed it against the wall in order to climb up. It is a heavy, powerful car, although old, since he had trouble in starting the engine again and was compelled to clean his carburettor first. His pocket lamp must have given out, for, despite the risk of an explosion, he struck a number of wax vestas which he stuck in a crevice of the wall. I wondered what the charred matches signified, until I discovered the wheel-tracks, a patch of oil, and other indications."

Monsieur Dufresne had meanwhile examined my photographs and read my report with great care; now he turned to Decauville: "You have had a narrow escape," he said grimly. "It only shows how overwhelming and misleading circumstantial evidence may be. That apparent fingerprint has definitely shaken my belief in the infallibility of imprints alone as proof. Thank your stars our laboratory experts are not easily deceived. The *juge d'instruction* shall have a complete report from me at once; no doubt he will set you free without delay," and at a



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4



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6

- 1 and 2. A COMPARATIVE MICROPHOTOGRAPH. (1) THE CAT'S HAIR FOUND UNDER LEMAIRE'S THUMBNAIL. (2) A HUMAN HAIR
3. THE PLASTER CAST OF THE FOOTPRINT FROM WHICH THE "CAMBOUIS" (4) (SO CHARACTERISTIC IN ITS APPEARANCE, AND WHICH ALL THOSE WHO DRIVE A CAR CARRY ABOUT THEIR PERSONS) WAS OBTAINED BY MICROPHOTOGRAPHY
- 5 AND 6. COMPARATIVE MICROPHOTOGRAPHS WHICH PROVED THAT DECAUVILLE'S KNIFE HAD BEEN CLEANED WITH A HANDKERCHIEF
5. WOOD PULP PAPER FRAGMENTS
6. SHREDS OF COTTON FROM A HANDKERCHIEF



sign Decauville was led away. The Italian had not spoken a word since his theories had been so rudely shattered; but he was a sportsman, he bowed to Bertillon and said gravely:

"I was wrong—forgive me. I shall stay in Paris until the real criminal is caught," and, saluting us in turn, he withdrew. My chief laughed silently when he had gone.

"That hand-print is indeed unique. I'd have sworn myself it was a fingerprint. To work now. Poor Madeleine Moreau will, I fancy, be able to help us. I sent for her this morning. Rousseau shall bring her upstairs at once."

Ten minutes later Rousseau came back with the girl. Her eyes were red with weeping, but she bore herself bravely.

"Who, then, *was* my fiancé, whom I knew as Jules Brignolles?" she demanded fiercely as soon as she entered Bertillon's office.

"A bad lot, I am afraid, mademoiselle, so do not grieve overmuch. He was known as Le Caïd, and had been a soldier in an African penal battalion, but Gaston Larue is his true name. He served two sentences for robbery with violence before he was twenty. He was undoubtedly the dead woman's lover, and had certainly planned to rob her. Can you recall if among his friends there was a tall, powerful man, possessing a motor-car, one who perhaps worked or had worked in a chemical factory?"

"You mean Colin—a brute of a man! He drove us twice to Versailles in a Dion Bouton car of which he was very proud. A veterinary surgeon, my fiancé told me; they had been soldiers together."

"Ah, a *vétérinaire*! That explains the poison. Where does he live?"

"I don't know, but Jules—oh, I still think of him as Jules—told me Colin was fond of frequenting apache haunts, and once took him to a place called the "Mother Goose Tavern", a vile place, I believe. It came out because my poor fiancé was involved in a fight whilst there and for a week had a bruised face. I'll tell you what—I'll accompany Monsieur Rousseau to-night. I'd know Colin at once, and point him out. I will dress as a *gigolette*."

Bertillon smiled at her spirit, then he looked at us.

"Better all make up as ruffians and go well armed. Three of you should be sufficient to see that the young lady comes to no harm."

So it was arranged, and the same evening Rousseau, Louys, and I, in villainous disguise, sat down to dinner in one of the cellar taverns of the Villette district with a *gigolette* in gaudy dress and lace-edged apron, her hair shiny with oil, although curled and beribboned, and her face coarsely painted. We were a fearsome quartette to behold, and our voices and conversation were attuned to our dress. Colin, we had learned, was usually known as Etienne, and had a sweetheart named Toto, noted for her fierce jealousy. This gave us an idea. Instead of arousing suspicion by enquiring for the fellow ourselves, we agreed to let Madeleine Moreau do so, knowing full well that a quarrel with Toto would probably result and cause her to reveal Colin's hiding-place.

We drifted from café to café until midnight, and at last at 'La Mère l'Oie', where dancing was already in progress, we had the good luck to see Toto. Arms akimbo, puffing lazily at a cigarette, Madeleine sauntered up to the filthy bar and enquired if "her man" had arrived.

"*Qui ça*, your man?" the ferocious old hag after whom the place was named, rasped suspiciously.

"Why, Etienne—of course," she replied, snapping her fingers. "I s'pose after the job he did the other night he thinks he can give me the slip—but he won't."

"Softly, softly *la petite*—you never know who's listening," *la mère* growled. "We don't mention such things as jobs here. Who are you, anyway?"

"Ask my *frangin*" [brother]—pointing to me. It was my cue, and shouldering my way forward, I roughly seized the girl by the shoulder.

"Keep your mouth shut, you fool; this isn't Vincennes."

"Vincennes or La Villette, I want that beast Colin," she retorted, loudly enough for the dancers to hear. At once the dreary squeak and whine of the accordion ceased, and Toto, leaning on the arm of a hulking fellow in brown fustian, slouched

up to us. With a lightning motion she jerked our plucky ally forward by her neckcloth and spat in a shrill voice :

"Who are you to call my sweetheart names ?"

"Your sweetheart ?—he's mine—not that I want him, but I want my share. He promised, and my pals there will see I get it."

At once pandemonium resulted, bottles and glasses crashed to the floor as the tables were pushed aside, and a fight seemed imminent, but already I had Madeleine behind me, and a tug at my sash brought the butt of a heavy pistol into sight.

"Now then, fair play !" I yelled. "Where's Colin ? Let him deny he promised to slip away to Marseilles with my *frangine* if he dares !"

"Fetch him, fetch him !" a dozen voices yelled ; all were eager to see the two girls in a pitched battle. "Let the wenches fight for Etienne !"

"He's at the garage, tinkering with his car !" Toto shouted. "I'll fetch him !"

"No, you don't," I retorted. "No slipping away with him in the dark. I'll go. Where is this place ?"

So soon as the necessary directions had been given I ran up the stairs to the street, where Rousseau, who had left the moment the row started, was waiting for me ; we knew Louys could be depended upon to protect the girl during our absence. The garage, in reality a dirty ruined stable, was situated at the end of an evil alley. We advanced on tiptoe, pistols ready, until the gleam of an acetylene headlamp and a sound of hammering warned us that Colin was indeed there. Peeping cautiously round the open door, we espied a bulky man in overalls, his brutish face wet with perspiration, bending over the engine of a big touring car. The opportunity was excellent, and before he could straighten up we were on him. He coughed like an angry tiger and fought as savagely, and, despite our advantage, it was touch and go, for the fellow's strength was terrific and he knew every apache trick. A lucky crack on the head from a spanner at last caused him to give at the knees, and in a moment we had him securely handcuffed and gagged.

"We'll take his car," Rousseau said breathlessly. "Put him inside while I start her up. Then you fetch Louys and the girl, and if the others try to follow we can get away safely."

It was good advice, and five minutes later we pulled up before the entrance to "La Mère l'Oie". My colleague was dancing now with Mlle. Moreau, so I slouched up to the bar and called for a drink. At once Toto strode forward menacingly. "Where is he? Afraid to come, perhaps?"

"Afraid? No, he'll be here soon enough," I replied. "And look out for trouble when he does come—he's spitting and swearing like a mad cat."

Louys had seen my signal, and was now slowly edging towards the door, feigning to whirl the girl around in a crazy *can-can*. I saw it was time to act, and before the crowd of sinister ruffians guessed my intention two thunderous shots from my pistol had shattered the big lamp and we dashed up the stairs, carrying Madeleine between us. It was indeed lucky we had the car, for as we tumbled pell-mell over the seats and Rousseau slipped in the clutch, a wave of yelling, cursing men and women erupted into the street. Several shots cracked, and my cap was whisked from my head, but we had a clear path, and the darkness made shooting uncertain.

We had not expected to make so important a capture. Colin was an escaped convict; his chart bore a dozen aliases; and in the car with which he had been hoping to cross the frontier were Gisèle Lemaire's jewels and money, and even the knife that had killed her. Moreover, if further proof had been needed, the tyres fitted the traces in the lane. When we questioned Colin he told us quite frankly that his pal Le Caïd had agreed to leave the door of the Villa unlocked, but had lost his nerve at the last moment. This caused Colin to fear he might betray him if arrested, and so whilst he had gone to collect money and jewels after the murder of Mme. Lemaire, Colin had put cyanide into one of the wineglasses and killed his accomplice also.

Colin escaped the guillotine by a clever trick, quite new to us. The molars of a dental plate he wore were hollow and filled with poison. These he unscrewed during the night

following his arrest, and when the warders entered the cell in the morning he was dead.

“Three glaring mistakes were his undoing,” Bertillon remarked as I classified the various exhibits. “He should have left his weapon and some of the jewellery lying near the bodies, he should have closed the judas, and he should not have come in a car ; had he thought of that, it is possible I might have believed Le Caïd had killed the woman and then committed suicide.”





**EPISODE VII**  
**THE CORSICAN DAGGER**



## THE CORSICAN DAGGER

WILL those whose duty it is to protect the community against the steadily growing legion of criminals ever realize that the fear and abhorrence the law-abiding citizen feels at the mere mention of the word "police" is due to the fact that every one of us, in the present state of affairs, is exposed to the terrific, soul-maiming possibility of arrest and detention on suspicion. In theory, the world over, an accused must be treated as innocent until he has been proven guilty. I say in theory, for in practice this is never so. From the moment a man has suffered the degrading and crushing experience of loss of liberty, even if only temporarily, his outlook on life has changed for all time. He will always feel a shrinking dread and a tensing of the nerves at the mere sight of a detective ; his nights will be haunted by dreams of the condemned cell, and he will for ever look back with loathing at the brutal, humiliating formalities to which he was subjected. For a time he has stepped over the dividing-line and glimpsed some of the horrors hidden by grey and massive walls and clanking barred gates. Nor will the knowledge that he is innocent bring a man arrested on suspicion any comfort, for he will inevitably recall the countless cases of incredible mistakes committed by the police. Moreover, he must suffer all the disruptive influences that are at once set to work against him ; nor does he receive compensation even for the loss of time and money to which he must submit. He is, moreover, handicapped from the start by the fact that, whilst the law is free to build up a crushing monument of evidence, he is a prisoner hampered by a thousand restrictions. This is specially so in Latin countries, where practically no distinction is made between an accused and a convicted prisoner, and where a man or woman may remain *several years* in a cell

awaiting trial. Surely a special lieu of detention, in which a suspected person would have a comfortable room, where he would not be subjected to the degrading formalities so dear to officialdom, and where he would not be given a foretaste of the horrors of prison, could easily be set apart for those awaiting trial? That the sword of *blind* justice is suspended over every man's head was proven again by the strange case of the Corsican Dagger. Only the precise, infallible work of the modern scientific police experts, evolved from the teachings of the great Alphonse Bertillon, and the impartiality of the *juge d'instruction*, who is an arbitrator owing allegiance neither to the police nor to the accused, have to some extent neutralized the danger of a miscarriage of justice in France, as the following true narrative will show.

It seemed to me as though the rhythmic intermittent whirr of a shrill bell had been mingling with my dreams for countless centuries, before I at last roused myself sufficiently to realize that it was the telephone ringing incessantly. Glancing at the luminous dial over the mantel, I saw to my astonishment that it was barely six o'clock. Something unusual had evidently happened during the night, for when I left headquarters the day before no case of importance had been reported. It was Jacques Laughton, chief of the Lyons Sûreté, speaking, and his hard voice actually carried a hint of excitement, a thing so extraordinary that the last lingering vestiges of sleep which still clogged my thoughts vanished instantly.

"Come along at once," he said. "I know you are off duty to-day, but I don't think you'll mind that ; I fancy it is going to be an interesting case."

"What is?" I grumbled. "You take it for granted I know what's happened."

"Of course you don't—but explanations over the telephone are risky. I shall be waiting with Voltaire at the Rue St. Jean ; we'll give you a rough outline whilst you swallow a cup of coffee," and without further ceremony my colleague rang off.

I dressed hastily and drove to the dingy building at the back of the Palace of Justice, where all suspected persons arrested in Lyons over-night are detained until they have been formally questioned by officers of the Sûreté.

I found Laughton impatiently pacing his office, while Voltaire, who had recently entered the fingerprints department, sat and chatted with his colleague François Levallois. A pot of steaming coffee stood on the table, from which I gathered that my friends had awaited my arrival before swallowing a hurried breakfast.

Laughton immediately waved me to a chair, and, seating himself on the edge of his desk, pulled a bulky report from a drawer.

"About two this morning," he began without preamble, "the officers Notalini and Brelocq, on duty in the Rue Thomasini, saw a man issue furtively from number seventeen. He was carrying a large dark object over his shoulder, and, although they were some distance away, they realized at once that it was a human body. He carried this to a spot fifty yards up the street, where building is in progress, and dropped it on a heap of stones. The police ran after the man and captured him just as he was about to enter the house again. At the unexpected appearance of the officers the fellow almost fainted with terror, and could only stammer 'I am innocent—I didn't kill him.'

"When questioned, he admitted he resided in the house, and was thereupon taken to his apartment on the second floor and ordered to sit in a chair, whilst Notalini ran to the nearest police station for assistance. He returned with the *commissaire* and two detectives. The body, which was that of a young man, was immediately placed on a stretcher and brought here. It was identified as that of a chemist named Guillaume Marsouin, whose rooms are above those of the presumed murderer. Marsouin had been stabbed and the blade had pierced the heart. The man whom the police apparently caught red-handed is Pietro Manzoni, a Corsican from Bastia, who has lived in Lyons many years, is well known, and has an excellent reputation. He is, moreover, the owner

of a prosperous business, and engaged to marry a very handsome Italian girl, Giuseppa Toldi, daughter of the famous sculptor, Carlo Toldi.

"Marsouin, it appears, had also long been a suitor for the girl's hand, but she had definitely rejected him some months ago and plighted her troth to the Corsican. There you have the gist of the tragedy."

"Well, it seems simple enough," I remarked. "A quarrel between the two men, who you say were both in love with the same girl. I saw her picture in the papers last week. She is more than handsome—Giuseppa Toldi is noted for her exquisite beauty, and also for her somewhat indiscreet flirtations."

"The knife was not in the wound; it was lying on the floor of Manzoni's bedroom," Laughton continued, as it seemed to me, quite irrelevantly. "The doctor has informed me that, judging by the position of the stab, the aorta was pierced. The place should have been a shambles—clothes soaked in blood—you know what I mean?"

I shuddered involuntarily. "Yes—I have seen many rooms where a man was killed in such fashion. What, then—was there no blood?"

"Oh yes, there was *some* blood, but hardly what I should expect. Moreover, the report of the local detectives emphasises, curiously enough, the deep impress left by an inert body on the bed, and that there was no sign of a struggle. If Marsouin was stabbed whilst lying on the bed, he had been there some time. The main thing is, how did he come to be lying on Manzoni's bed, and, in fact, what was he doing in another man's room?"

"You say a dagger was found on the floor. Whose weapon is it?"

"The Corsican's; it is one of those antique Vendetta knives. Here you are"—and my friend pointed to a tin box. I opened it and saw, resting on a layer of cotton wool, a broad, wicked-looking dagger with damascened blade and ornamented handle. It was at least a foot long, and tapered to a keen point. A smear of blood crossed the surface, but the haft was brightly polished.

"Doesn't look as though it had pierced a man's heart, does it?" Levallois exclaimed with a chuckle. "Yet there is no doubt it did: it fits the wound—I measured it."

I gazed in perplexity at my colleagues. It was obvious from their restrained manner that they had already formed a theory.

"To put it plainly," Voltaire said, coming to the table and filling my cup with coffee, "we think there is more in this than meets the eye. Manzoni probably killed the young chemist, but not with his knife; it was used as a blind in order to lead us astray, I imagine; for the blade entered the heart when life was already extinct."

Laughton nodded. "The doctor is positive on that point. However, it's foolish to theorize in advance. The Corsican's flat has been sealed, and a gendarme is on guard. Nothing has been touched except the dagger, and the spot where it lay is marked. So come along; we'll go there now and investigate. Then we shall interrogate the prisoner pending the arrival of a *juge d'instruction*. I have ordered Voltaire to make enquiries into the past of the victim and the accused. He is in cell nine. Perhaps you would like to have a look at him?"

Peeping through the tiny funnel-shaped hole in the door, I perceived a swarthy, handsome man of about thirty sitting on the iron frame of his bed. Untidy, ragged strands of black hair half covered his broad, intellectual forehead, as though he had pulled wildly at it in a frenzy of despair. The face was dirty and stained with the tears that still glistened wetly on the cheeks, and his moustache drooped pathetically. At the click of the shutter he shrank back fearfully, and I saw that terror had wellnigh driven the unhappy wretch insane.

"Why did you remove his clothes and boots?" I queried, for the prisoner was dressed in grey prison canvas, and dingy slippers dangled from his bare feet.

"Well, there are several curious points about them. They are upstairs in your laboratory. When we have finished at the man's flat you must examine each garment carefully."

A police car was already waiting for us in the dirty courtyard, so, leaving all further discussion of the case until later, we at once drove to the house in the Rue Thomasini. Although



it was still early, barely seven in fact, the news of the tragedy had already spread from door to door, and a curious crowd, kept in check by a cordon of gendarmes, hailed our appearance with excited cries, surging like a sombre wave against the impassive police.

Strips of paper bearing the official seal of the Sûreté, had been pasted across the entrance to the Corsican's flat, and these Laughton removed carefully ; then, accompanied by the *commissaire*, who had been hastily summoned, we entered a dingy narrow passage. It was so dark that I instinctively turned the electric switch, but, to my surprise, without result. Laughton quickly laid a restraining hand on my shoulder.

"Levallois—go and look at the meter ; you'll probably find it in the kitchen," he ordered curtly. "See if the current has been cut off."

The little detective slipped noiselessly through a door on the left, to return a minute later, a queer expression on his face.

"The current is on—but a main fuse has been removed," he reported. "I took care not to touch the box and glass lid which covers them—there may be fingerprints."

Laughton looked meaningly at me and nodded. "Yes, you must see to that before we go—you have brought your outfit, I hope?"

"Of course. I have all that may be needed : gelatine slips, powdered lead oxide, and lenses. My camera is in the car."

Without another word Laughton drew his favourite magnifying-glass from a leather case and began to examine the floor and walls, whilst I waited by the door with the *commissaire*.

"There is nothing here," my friend said after a few minutes, "except a ragged tear in the wallpaper, which may mean much or nothing. Where is the bedroom?"

The detective who had questioned Manzoni led us to a spacious, comfortably furnished room. It contained the usual chairs and couch ; a handsomely inlaid oval table stood in the centre, littered with books and papers, and a dressing-table with swinging mirror, on which were brushes and toilet requisites, filled the recess beneath the window. Levallois at once dropped to hands and knees and proceeded to scrutinize

the carpet, whilst Laughton remained motionless beside the bed, his eyes roving from side to side ; obviously he was trying to visualize the scene of the previous night.

"That chair," he abruptly exclaimed, pointing towards the window, "was it overturned when you came, *monsieur le commissaire* ?"

"Nothing has been changed, sir. I noticed that it was lying on its side when I came to remove the body."

Striding to the toilet table, Laughton examined the slight film of dust on the polished glass surface, then he picked up a large cylindrical electric torch from the floor and measured the diameter.

"This lamp had stood here," he remarked thoughtfully, "and the switch by the door is on. Evidently someone entered, tried to turn on the light, but without result, since a fuse had been disconnected, and that 'someone' was probably Manzoni. He knew the torch was there, stepped quickly towards the window, upsetting the chair in his haste—it is a heavy chair, we'll see if Manzoni's leg is bruised—then, at the sight the torch revealed he dropped it in terror and it rolled towards the bed. That would seem to show that he did not expect to find a dead man on the bed—eh ?"

The exclamation was caused by an excited call from Levallois, who was examining some bloodstains on the floor with lens and lamp.

"This blood has dripped from someone *standing* motionless by the bed !" the little detective cried shrilly. "See—it has the starred circular shape that is so characteristic. Now a man whose heart has been pierced by a heavy knife would hardly remain standing, and it is red arterial blood, not the black blood that would spurt from the heart."

I knelt beside my colleague and saw at once that what he said was true. But in order to make quite sure I detached several tiny particles and packed them between glass slides.

"Well, there is nothing more to be gleaned for the moment," Laughton remarked at last with a sigh of satisfaction. "An interesting investigation. You have sealed the dead man's room, of course?" he added, turning to the *commissaire*. "Good

—then do as much for this apartment again. We will now interrogate the prisoner and afterwards return for a search of Marsouin's place. Meanwhile, Levallois, will you examine the doors and locks? Let me have a report at headquarters as soon as possible."

Manzoni had spent the night in a state of listless apathy, but with the dawn a violent reaction had succeeded the shock of his arrest, and when he was led into Laughton's office by two gendarmes he gave way to a frenzied outburst of rage.

"I am the victim of a foul plot, messieurs ; a cowardly enemy is seeking to ruin me. I swear I am innocent !"

"Sit down, monsieur Manzoni," Laughton said gently. "We are inclined to believe you, but you must tell us the truth if we are to assist you. Go back to yesterday and relate in detail what happened. In detail, mind you ; the seemingly unimportant things are the most important. What time did you leave your office ?"

"At five in the afternoon."

"Ah—and when do you generally leave ?"

"At seven, usually, but it depends on the stress of work—sometimes I remain until midnight."

"But you say you left early yesterday : where did you go ? What did you do ?"

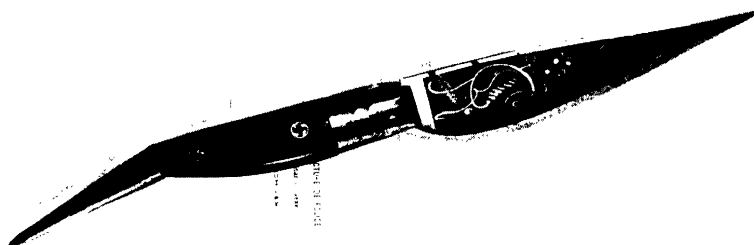
For a moment the man's face became pale and beads of moisture formed on his brow, then the blood surged to his face, and his gaze, which had been frank and steady, shifted uneasily.

"I had some business calls to make. These occupied me until eight, when I went to dine at the Restaurant des Alpes."

"No doubt the people you visited will come forward to corroborate your statement. You must give me a list of them."

At the words Manzoni sprang to his feet and, pounding the table, fiercely shouted, "I refuse to be questioned in this manner ! Am I a schoolboy——"

"You are a prisoner suspected of murder. Remember that. Violence and bluster will not help you. Who were the people you saw ?"



2

3

1. THE TERRIBLE CORSICAN DAGGER—A FOOT LONG—WHICH DUBOIS USED TO THROW SUSPICION ON MANZONI
2. A MICROPHOTOGRAPH OF ARTERIAL BLOOD PRECIPITATED BY HOT ACETIC ACID. THIS TEST WAS APPLIED IN THE CASE OF THE CORSICAN DAGGER
3. A POLICE CHART OF THE CHARACTERISTIC APPEARANCE OF BLOOD. (1) A DROP FALLEN FROM A MOTIONLESS PERSON STANDING UPRIGHT AS IN MANZONI'S BEDROOM. (2) FROM A PERSON SWAYING DRUNKENLY. (3) FROM A PERSON FALLING FORWARD. (4) FROM A WOUNDED PERSON RUNNING. (5) WALKING. (6) A BLOODSTAINED FINGERPRINT



"I refuse to tell you !"

"Very well, you are only complicating matters—we shall find out. You went to dine at a restaurant : do you always dine in town ?"

"Yes, I am a bachelor ; my housekeeper leaves at eight. Sometimes, if I wish it, she prepares a cold repast before going home. Last night, when I had finished my meal, I sat and played cards with some friends—I will give you their names—until ten. As I left the restaurant a good customer of mine—Charles Dubois, the wine-merchant, who lives in the Avenue Cantoni, accosted me and to my surprise invited me to celebrate an unexpected windfall, an inheritance from an uncle in Canada, he said. I was astonished, for Dubois is generally a surly fellow, and until then we had been just business acquaintances, nothing more. I tried to make excuses but he would hear of no refusal. I noticed that his eyes were bloodshot and his face very pale ; I fancy he had been drinking. He said that a dozen good friends were already gathered at the famous Inn of the Vignerons at Allois. Now, as you know, Allois is fifteen kilometres from town, and I objected that it was late and that my car was at the garage ; but Dubois passed his arm under mine and led me to his own motor. He said he would drive me out and return with me. I saw there was no way out except by refusing point-blank, and Dubois is a very important customer, so I climbed to a seat beside him. Once outside the town he fell silent and appeared to be much concerned about his lights, which were in truth very dim——"

"Wait a moment," Laughton interrupted. "What kind of car was this, 'open or closed ?"

"Closed—a Delage saloon."

Laughton nodded. "Go on, monsieur, what then ?"

"We had gone about half-way—driving very slowly because of the uncertain light—when the engine began to behave queerly. It stopped altogether a moment later, and Dubois climbed down and began to fumble under the bonnet. I got down also and lit several matches, but he snarled at me and told me to keep away because his carburettor was leaking and the petrol might catch fire."

"Are these the matches you used?" Laughton asked, placing a flat paper "pochette" of the type from which one tears thin red slips, one by one, on the table.

It had evidently been taken from the prisoner's clothes, and only two matches remained.

Manzoni looked at it a moment half fearfully, then he said in a low voice :

"Yes, that is mine—I thought I had lost it."

"It had slipped between the open pages of a letter—we will come to that later. Continue, please."

"Dubois appeared unable to restart his engine, and became more and more aggressive. I also am inclined to be short-tempered, and finally we quarrelled. I accused him of making a fool of me, and when he told me to go to blazes, I took my coat from the car and, leaving him to repair his engine as best he could, set out on foot for home, despite the danger of the deserted roads. There was something altogether strange and sinister about the whole business—you will understand what I mean later. It was a long, dusty tramp back to town, and I heard one o'clock strike as I inserted the key in my door. To my annoyance and surprise, the electric light had gone wrong—the switch refused to work. I always keep a pocket lamp in my bedroom, and I groped my way in the dark to the window where it stood. I thought that perhaps my house-keeper had cut off the current at the meter, because several times she forgot to turn out the lights before leaving, and I had threatened to discharge her for this negligence."

"Did you knock over a chair when you searched for your lamp?"

Manzoni started violently, and his eyes widened with awe. "I did indeed, but how do you know that?"

Laughton waved his hand. "Proceed, please."

"I found the lamp, and was about to use it, when a ray of moonlight from the window in front of me fell on the bed and I saw that something—someone—lay there. An icy horror contracted my nerves at the unexpected sight. I shut my eyes a moment, thinking it had been a delusion, but no, there was truly a long rigid body and a vague ghastly face on the

bedcover. For a long time I could not move. Then terror gripped me ; I dropped the lamp, tried to find it, and finally fumbled for the matches. But I could not remove my eyes from that figure lying so still on my bed. A haft that gleamed slightly protruded from the breast, and I knew that haft—it was my own knife. My father had pressed it into my hand when he was dying. I was only a boy at the time, and he had made me swear the vendetta on it. For centuries our family and the Costas of Bastia have carried on the traditional blood feud of our island, and it was to escape from that hereditary curse I came to France. The sight of the knife was like an electric shock. The darkness maddened me. I groped on the floor until at last I found my lamp and flashed the welcome rays around the room. I saw then that the body on the bed was that of a neighbour, Guillaume Marsouin, and his blue lips and white face confirmed my worst fears—he was dead !”

For a second Manzoni hesitated, his face twitched, and beads of sweat rolled down his cheeks as he recalled the terrors of the past night. Laughton silently poured him a glass of water, which he drank greedily, then, his eyes on the ground, he continued haltingly :

“You see, what frightened me more than anything else was that I had not met a soul on the long walk back, I could not prove I had only just returned—and—and—Marsouin had been in love with my sweetheart. I don’t think he was quite normal. He pestered her constantly—and—well, Giuseppa is inclined to be a coquette. One day we quarrelled, and I publicly threatened to kill Marsouin if he did not keep away.”

“You have in fact the reputation of a man who uses his knife easily,” Laughton interposed brutally. At the words the Corsican flung out his hands :

“I am hot-blooded, like all my race, but I have never stabbed anyone.”

Laughton selected a sheet of paper from among his documents and pushed it towards Manzoni.

“This unsigned letter was found in your clothes. It states that Marsouin was seen talking to Mademoiselle Toldi two days ago. Has that any bearing on the matter ?”



Manzoni flushed angrily. "The vilest thing on this earth is an anonymous letter. I didn't know I had kept it. I thought I threw it away. Anyhow, I tackled my sweetheart about Marsouin, and she admitted that the fellow had made a last appeal, but that she definitely gave him to understand she was marrying me."

"Well, what did you do when you recognized the body on your bed?"

"I completely lost my head. I knew that even if I called the police I should be arrested; everything pointed to my guilt. So I picked up the dead man——"

"Wait a bit—was the body limp?"

"I—I don't remember. No, not very. It felt hard, and horribly cold. I hoisted it to my shoulders—I am very strong—and carried it downstairs. The street appeared deserted; there was, I knew, some building going on not far away, and I dropped my terrible burden on a heap of stones. As you know, I had been seen, and was arrested just as I opened my door."

"Your story is very clear and convincing. This Dubois will no doubt testify that you were in his car when it broke down far from town."

"He will not—I know it—I feel it! Dubois purposely drove me out and left me to walk home."

We all looked in astonishment at the prisoner, but Laughton became thoughtful, and remained several minutes bent over his notes. Finally he looked up and said:

"That does not matter, we shall be able to discover easily enough if you have told the truth. It is more important that you should tell me where you spent the evening from five to eight; for, if I am not mistaken, Marsouin was killed *some time during the afternoon!*"

The Corsican's face set stubbornly. "Then you must do as you will. I refuse to tell you where I went."

Laughton pressed a bell and ordered the gendarme who appeared at the summons to conduct Manzoni to his cell. When he had gone the Sûreté chief gazed at us with a queer smile.

"Well, what is your opinion, Levallois? Do you think Manzoni's told the truth?"

"I have an idea that he told part of the truth. That is clever. It makes his story just circumstantial enough to carry weight. No doubt he killed Marsouin early in the afternoon. Then he seized on the opportunity Dubois gave him to create a mystery and perhaps an alibi. As I see it, the young fellow was strangled or poisoned. The doctor will tell us that. Then the Corsican dined, drove out of town with Dubois, purposely quarrelled with him, and returned on foot late at night. To make the thing more mysterious he drove his dagger into the lifeless body and then carried it to the building-site, hoping it would be found in the morning."

"Wait a bit—your theory is ingenious—but how do you account for the missing fuse and the overturned chair? Why did he use his own knife, where did the blood come from, and why in heaven's name didn't he leave his victim where he was?"

"He couldn't leave him in his own bed."

"I don't mean that—he wasn't killed in Manzoni's room. You forgot that the housekeeper was there until eight. I have already ascertained that."

Levallois threw up his hands in despair.

"Then, if you have the answers to your questions, tell us what they are."

"I have not arrived at a definite solution yet, but, remember, the weak spot in all premeditated crimes is the premeditation. Suppose that someone who hated both Marsouin and the Corsican killed the young chemist, carried the body to Manzoni's room—remember that tear in the wallpaper—drove the knife into the body, and removed the fuse, counting on the panic the darkness would produce; that would fit the facts—eh? Well, we are wasting time; fanciful theories are useless. During the morning we shall have the doctor's and Voltaire's report; meanwhile we will call on this Dubois and hear his tale. I should also like to examine his car. But first I intend to have a look at the road to Allois. Later, according to results, the laboratory must examine and analyse the stains on the prisoner's clothes. He has also a slight wound,

a stab, I think, on his arm. His shirt is bloodstained too; perhaps the blood in his room came from there—but I don't think so."

Driving slowly, and carefully avoiding the centre of the road, we had reached a spot about eight miles from town, when Laughton suddenly ordered the driver to stop and climbed out. Just by a sharp bend there was a patch of oil and the tracks of a car which had zigzagged queerly, and a little farther on the ground had been scored deeply by a faulty start. With a shout of triumph Laughton stooped and picked up several red charred fragments and one entire match which had not ignited.

"These came from a pochette such as we found in the Corsican's pocket. Micro-photographs will prove if the torn ends fit the stubs. If they do Manzoni's tale is true up to this point. Wait a moment," and my friend walked back some distance, taking care to step only on the grass that bordered the road and stopping now and then to scrutinize the ground. His eyes gleamed with excitement when at last he rejoined us.

"I have examined and measured the footprints; fortunately no one has passed here since this morning. I believe the dust on the prisoner's trousers is this same white impalpable powder which lies thickly everywhere, and here is another such thorn as I found sticking in one of his bootlaces. I am convinced now Manzoni did walk home after separating from Dubois."

"Which merely proves that, so far, his tale is true," Levallois objected stubbornly.

Laughton laughed, but made no reply, then, as the car started, he turned to me and said: "I wonder if Dubois will also tell the truth. I fancy we shall soon gather the various threads now. All we really lack is the name of the other woman in the case."

"The other woman?" I ejaculated in surprise.

"Yes, Giuseppa Toldi is one, but I am convinced there is another. That anonymous letter was in a feminine hand."

My first impression of Dubois was that the fellow was a somewhat reserved but honest business man, inclined to taciturnity and lacking in intelligence, with a neutral, insignifi-

cant personality. He was tall, spare, with high cheekbones, very thin lips, and almost expressionless grey eyes. But as Laughton fired question upon question at him I received a shock. Behind those lifeless eyes burned a fierce flame of hate. An alert, watchful intelligence, masked by the fellow's apparent sincerity, was coolly appraising us, taking our measure, and weighing chances. The man was a skilful actor, and his honesty only a pose. Almost at once my friend's clever interrogation drove Dubois into a corner. He had denied vehemently that he had met and invited Manzoni to accompany him in his car to Allois.

"But you went to Allois, nevertheless," Laughton insisted.

"Yes, I drove to an inn near there, to dine with friends and to celebrate an unexpected inheritance, but I went alone."

"You stopped near milestone C. 46. Why was that?"

"My engine was running badly. I got down to clean the carburettor."

"What time was that?"

"About eight o'clock. I am not sure."

"What light did you use to work with?"

"A pocket lamp."

"You did not use matches?"

"Of course not. Why do you ask?"

"Your friends were already waiting at the inn, you say—you must have dined late?"

"I could not get away sooner, and telephoned requesting them to begin without me, so that my breakdown did not matter."

"Well, we should like to examine your car. Where is it?"

A faint derisive smile flickered about the thin lips at this question.

"At the garage—it is being cleaned and overhauled."

It was evident that Dubois had foreseen the possibility of fingerprints or other traces being found on the car which would disprove his statements, and had checkmated us by this adroit move. Beaten for the moment, we had risen ready to go, when the door opened abruptly and a tall, handsome woman with burning eyes and pale, anxious face entered. Before she could speak Dubois cried :

"These are police officers, Madeleine. They have come in connection with the murder in the Rue Thomasini. That blackguard Manzoni swears I invited him to my celebration last night, and that he was with me when the car broke down."

At the words, so obviously meant as a warning, the woman turned on us with a fierce gesture.

"Manzoni is a scoundrel. He lies. My husband knows that the Corsican has long been following me with his unwelcome attentions; is it likely, therefore, that they would be together?"

"Did Manzoni visit you yesterday during the afternoon?" Laughton asked quietly. At the question the woman became livid.

"How dare you suggest such a thing. Did the fellow say so?"

"On the contrary, he refuses to say where he spent the afternoon. No doubt we shall find out soon," and without another word Laughton bowed and withdrew.

"The other woman," he said with a laugh when we had returned to headquarters; "and Dubois lied—so now we hold the main thread. Ah, here is the doctor's report; wait," and he rapidly scanned the document a gendarme had brought. "Aha, Doctor Dupret states that Marsouin was poisoned—an injection of digitalis. Death must have followed within half an hour. He thinks the injection was made by a left-handed man—and probably self-inflicted. H—m—m, that's curious—the young man was a qualified chemist. Suicide—now I wonder . . ." and Laughton walked to the window just as Voltaire came hurrying in.

"I have discovered some queer things," our colleague cried breathlessly. "Marsouin was employed at the experimental laboratory in the Avenue Puget. He had been very strange in his manner of late, and yesterday morning, according to his employer, he complained of terrible pains in the head. His appearance was so startling that he was advised to consult a doctor at once. He did not return to his work, but about two o'clock he was seen in a café talking earnestly with a man named Charles Dubois. Dubois has a handsome wife, whose infatuation for our prisoner is the talk of the neighbourhood, the more so since it appears that the Corsican will have nothing

to do with her. I have checked the telephone calls that came through to Manzoni's office during the day—they are all entered in a book by his secretary ; and about four there was an urgent call from a woman who refused to give her name. The message apparently upset Manzoni, for he went out soon after, and although he had not signed his letters, informed the secretary that probably he would not return. Moreover, Dubois knew about his wife's infatuation for Manzoni, but, since he is madly in love with Mademoiselle Toldi, said nothing ; in fact he probably hoped to reap an advantage from an intrigue between his wife and the girl's fiancé."

Laughton nodded thoughtfully.

"That about clears up the case, so far as the plot and motives are concerned. Dubois is a cunning and dangerous devil. I fancy he was in close touch with the young chemist and knew the poor fellow was suffering from acute melancholia. Marsouin must have become obsessed with the idea of committing suicide and abstracted poison and syringe from his employer's laboratory. And I'll wager Dubois discovered this and at once saw how he could ruin the man who had, perhaps unwittingly, stolen his wife's love, and who was also his rival for the girl Giuseppa, and cause him to be accused of murder without risk to himself. Come, we will now examine the dead man's room. We can then lay a complete case before the *juge d'instruction* and apply for a warrant for the arrest of Dubois."

As we mounted the stairs, Laughton pointed to a long scratch on the wall, about four feet from the ground. "That fits in with my theory," he said. "Before we go in, have a peep with your lens at the lock, Levallois."

The little detective did so, and a moment later he straightened up and held out a tiny piece of yellow wax. Laughton gave a satisfied grunt. "I thought so: someone took an impression and manufactured a duplicate or a skeleton key, with which he opened the door. I found scratches and tool-marks on the Corsican's door also."

There was no sign of a struggle in Marsouin's bedroom, but a depression such as a body would leave was plainly visible in the mattress. The lower sheet had been partially dragged

away, and one corner dangled on the floor. Almost at once Laughton called my attention to a pin sticking in the pillow, to which a minute fragment of paper still adhered. "I fully expected to find that," he said with a gratified smile, "and there on the chair is a phial marked 'Digitalis', and beside it a hypodermic syringe. We may as well go now. Please have a look at the dead man's clothes and boots," he added, turning to me, "especially the laces. Find out if they were normally tied, in case they have been removed at the mortuary, and see if collar and tie present an unusual appearance. Then join me in my office ; the *juge d'instruction* will be there in an hour."

I began to have a clear conception of Laughton's reasoning when, obedient to his orders, I examined Marsouin's boots and questioned the official at the mortuary. The laces had been loosened and clumsily knotted, and on one toe-cap was a streak of wallpaper and paint. Moreover, it was apparent at once that the tie had been pulled awry and the collar only buttoned on the shirt in front by someone in a great hurry. The investigating magistrate was already reading Laughton's report when I arrived with the result of my enquiries.

"A fantastic tale," he said at last, looking up with a frown. "I must have tangible proof before I can give you a warrant on such evidence. You believe this Dubois actually foresaw that the young chemist Marsouin would commit suicide ?"

"Undoubtedly ; Marsouin was ill, complained of a violent headache, and left his work with the definitely formed plan of taking his own life. This phial and syringe are his employer's property, and were taken from the poison-cupboard by the young man. Only he had the key, and it was still on the ring on which he always carried it. He was seen talking to Dubois in a café, and I feel sure it was then he told him of his fatal decision. Dubois, who is a cunning creature, at once saw in the man's suicide an opportunity to ruin Manzoni, since he had already publicly threatened to kill Marsouin. I am sure the anonymous letter found on the prisoner was written by Madeleine Dubois at her husband's dictation. He followed the chemist home, took an impression of the locks, and then invited a number of friends to celebrate a fictitious windfall that

evening, purposely choosing an inn far from town. It was necessary that the Corsican should be unable to prove where he passed the afternoon and evening. I have evidence that corroborates this so far. Dubois must have prevailed on his wife to telephone to Manzoni, begging him to come to her immediately. What pretext she invented I don't know, but I am convinced the man went to her when he left his office at five, and he is chivalrous enough not to admit it, although I questioned him repeatedly. Whilst he was with Madeleine Dubois the husband entered Marsouin's flat and found that the young fellow had indeed killed himself. He was lying in bed, and on his pillow was a farewell note. We found the pin with a fragment of paper still fastened to the pillow-case. Dubois tore away the note, lifted the body from the bed, dragging the sheet to the floor in doing so, and dressed the body ; we know that, because the bootlaces, tie, and collar were clumsily fastened, just as they would be by someone compelled to handle an inert body, and the impression in the mattress proves Marsouin undressed and went to bed after injecting the digitalis. Dubois then carried the body to the Corsican's bedroom. Unfortunately for the success of his scheme, he must have wished to make quite sure Manzoni would be accused of murder, and drove a dagger lying on a table into the dead man's heart. Naturally the wound did not bleed. This must have startled Dubois, and I believe that he thereupon cut himself slightly, on the arm probably, and allowed the blood to drip on the body, the bed, and the floor. Our tests have shown that it is arterial blood, and that it did not come from the dead man. Then Dubois removed a fuse from the switchboard ; there are several fingerprints on the fuse-box, and they are not the Corsican's."

"Why should he remove a fuse ?"

"Because he reckoned—and rightly so—on the terrible shock to the Corsican's nerves if, feeling his way in the dark, he suddenly encountered a dead body on his bed. Well, thereupon Dubois must have either followed Manzoni to the restaurant where he usually dined, or else his wife had played the spy and told her husband where to find him, so that when the Corsican



left the tavern Dubois was able to invite him to a carouse, drive him out of town, and compel him to return on foot."

For some minutes the magistrate drummed thoughtfully on the table, then he said sharply :

"Set a man to watch Dubois and his wife. To-morrow I shall confront them with the prisoner. I may perhaps send for his fiancée also. Meanwhile find out who the people were with whom Dubois spent the night at Allois, and question them. Bring your report to my office at eleven."

When Pietro Manzoni was taken from his cell the following morning I was startled at the terrible change wrought in his appearance in so short a time ; his erstwhile glossy black hair was streaked with grey, his face appeared hollow and seamed with deep lines, whilst his eyes were full of a despair dreadful to witness. Although it was quite wrong, I gave his arm a reassuring pressure and whispered some words of encouragement, but he was too far gone to understand. Hardly had the magistrate ordered him to be seated when the door opened again and Madeleine Dubois, white and almost swooning, was led in by a gendarme. She stood for a minute transfixed with horror at sight of Manzoni, then a wild cry of remorse and pity burst from her lips and, staggering forward, she sank to her knees beside the unfortunate man, tears streaming down her face.

"Pietro, Pietro, forgive me ! I didn't realize what I did. It was Charles ordered me to telephone to you—and, because it gave me an opportunity to see you and to hear your dear voice again, I did it. Your betrothal to Giuseppa Toldi has driven me nearly insane. There were times when I hated you indeed, but I cannot bear to see you suffer so !" Then, turning to the *juge*, she cried : "I do not know what my husband has done, but Pietro was with me from five until eight, and I followed him afterwards and told my husband where he had gone. I know also that he was taken half-way to Allois in my husband's car and left to return on foot."

The magistrate made a sign to the gendarme and the sobbing woman was led away.

"Why do you think Dubois concocted this devilish scheme to ruin you ? Was there anything between that woman and yourself?"

The Corsican had sat until that moment like a man in a trance, but at the words he roused himself, "No, monsieur, nothing—I swear it. I love my fiancée too well."

The magistrate touched a bell, Manzoni was conducted into another room, and almost at once the girl whose beauty had caused so much suffering entered. It was evident her faith in her lover had been shaken by the news of his arrest, for she advanced slowly, her eyes full of fear. The magistrate wasted no time in preliminaries :

"Did Charles Dubois ever make love to you?" he asked bluntly.

The crude question was like a tangible blow, and Giuseppa Toldi sank into a chair and burst into tears.

"That dreadful man," she sobbed, "I hate him. He has persecuted me day and night, ever since, once, foolishly enough, I flirted with him at a dance. I didn't dare to tell Pietro Manzoni—he is so violent—I was afraid."

"Thank you, that is all I wished to know" ; then, when the girl had gone, he recalled the Corsican. "You will soon be free, monsieur," he said gently. "I cannot release you until we have caught the arch schemer, but be of good cheer, that will not be long," and, filling in the potent warrant, the *juge* handed it to Laughton with a fierce, "Hurry now. I want to see the man capable of concocting such a damnable plot under lock and key before nightfall."

Voltaire was waiting for us in the passage ; at sight of the warrant Laughton flourished he said, "Dubois has taken fright. He left home dressed in dingy overalls immediately after his wife went out, and hurried to the 'Red Flag'. You know it—the worst criminal haunt in Lyon. I have two detectives posted outside watching the place."

Laughton whistled reflectively.

"H-m-m, then we had better send police to surround the den and arm ourselves. It will probably come to a fight. The best time to raid the inn will be just before dawn, when the ruffians that usually lurk there will be drunk or asleep. If Dubois leaves before that, follow him, and get him into a Sûreté car ; if not, we meet at the 'Drapeau Rouge' an hour before daybreak."

Evidently our quarry believed that he had given us the slip; a detective who went to the infamous tavern during the evening dressed as a loafer reported that Dubois spent his time playing cards with the landlord and several of his chosen allies. It was well the officer had been able to enter without arousing suspicion, for our man had cleverly transformed himself. His head had been partly shaven and the remaining fringe of hair bleached and dyed a dirty grey. This and the false moustache and rough clothes he had assumed so changed him that we might easily have been deceived by the clever disguise.

I slept little that night; it was not the first time we had been at grips with the denizens of the "Reg Flag", and I foresaw that with the coming day a hand-to-hand encounter with formidable ruffians would be inevitable. It was obvious now that Dubois, a seemingly respectable wine-merchant, must at some time have been a criminal, since he had immediately found sanctuary in the underworld.

It was still dark when we gathered near the Rhône, well-armed and prepared to force our way into the building. A distant church clock struck five as Laughton rapped sharply at the heavy door. Some minutes elapsed; then a bestial tousled head appeared at a window above us. One glance was enough, apparently, for at once we heard several heavy iron shutters swiftly clang shut, and a rasping murmur, as from a swarm of angry wasps, rose from the numerous rooms. Evidently the inmates hoped to escape through the maze of alleys at the rear, but our uniformed police had barred every possible issue. Giving the startled ruffians no time to recover from their fright, we at once attacked the door with levers and heavy mallets, and under the terrific onslaught the stout barrier soon gave way. With a rush we were inside, our men immediately spreading from floor to floor. Already we believed that the worst was over, when, abruptly, a blinding flame burst from a room on the ground floor, followed by an explosion that shook the building. Yellow seething flames swept greedily along the passages, and heavy, stifling fumes compelled us to retreat. Someone had set fire to a tank of petrol.

"Outside—the roof!" Voltaire yelled. "They've thrown an iron bridge over the gap to the next house and are all scrambling across!"

What followed was like a nightmare. Our men dispersed swiftly, barring the nearby streets; screaming women were hauled from broken windows through which the fire was licking hungrily; shots crashed wherever a crouching figure appeared on the roof, and bullets whistled incessantly past our ears. Fortunately the hastily summoned fire brigade arrived quickly and clamped ladders to the walls, and thus we were able to continue the chase over the housetops. Soon most of the gang who had been hidden in the "Drapeau Rouge" were safely locked in the police van. Dubois was caught in the garret of an adjoining building crouching in a cupboard, and, leaving the uniformed police to follow, we at once dragged the fellow to headquarters.

His interrogation by the examining magistrate was as swift as it was subtle.

Without the least preamble, when the man's identity had been formally established, the *juge* exclaimed crisply: "Charles Dubois, you are charged with the murder of the young chemist Marsouin."

Like the tide receding from a flat shore, all colour swept from the man's face at the terrible words, leaving him pale as death. A minute passed whilst he vainly sought a loophole, then, throwing out his hands, he cried wildly:

"No—no—not murder—I staged that, in order to make the man I hate appear guilty; Marsouin committed suicide."

Thus the whole truth at last came out, but there was little Laughton's patient investigation had overlooked.

Dubois was indeed madly in love with Giuseppa Toldi, yet, strange to say, he was also jealous of his wife's infatuation for Manzoni. He had thus a double reason for hating the Corsican. He had wormed his way into the confidence of the chemist with no definite plan, actuated only by the knowledge that Marsouin also loved Giuseppa. And fate had played into his hands. Marsouin, who had acted queerly for some time, had shown Dubois the phial and syringe, and had confessed that,

since he was unable to marry the girl, he intended to end his life. Inspired by his burning hatred, Dubois realized at once how he could use the foolish young man as a catspaw. He had accompanied him home and taken an impression of the lock. It had been necessary, of course, to prevent the Corsican from giving a clear account of his movements on that fatal day, and Dubois had callously used his own wife to further his scheme. When, about five, the cunning plotter entered Marsouin's bedroom he found him lying in bed and already dead. He had thereupon dressed Marsouin, torn the farewell letter from the pillow, and, as soon as it was dark, carried the body to the Corsican's room. There the dagger had caught his eye, and, to make quite sure that the police would assume the young fellow had been murdered by Manzoni, he had driven the blade into the lifeless body. To his annoyance, the wound did not bleed. Realizing that some blood was absolutely necessary, he had thereupon coolly opened a vein in his arm and allowed the blood to drip on floor and bed. By a curious coincidence Madeleine Dubois, who had enticed Manzoni to her flat, but by an urgent fictitious message, had tried in vain once more to win the man she loved, and, furious at being repulsed, had snatched up a knife and stabbed him slightly in the arm. The invitation to celebrate an imaginary inheritance at an inn far from town, and the breakdown of the car, were all part of the scheme.

Dubois was tried and sentenced to a long term of imprisonment for conspiracy, and sent to Cayenne.

Manzoni was, of course, released immediately, but the terrible ordeal had so crushed and broken him, that a month later he returned to Corsica with his young wife, whose fatal beauty had so completely wrecked two lives and brought her lover under the menace of the guillotine.

[NOTE.—The outline of this case was reported in the *Courrier du Rhone*, September 1927, and a résumé of the scientific investigation was published some months later in the *Gazette de Criminology*, Favart & Cie, Paris.]

**EPISODE VIII**  
**S.S. “VILLE DE BREST”**



## S.S. "VILLE DE BREST"

I HAD just switched the current into the electric bolt of the laboratory door, intending to settle down in peace to a complex analysis of two gun-wads which would prove by their composition the guilt or innocence of a notorious poacher arrested for murder, when the door rattled noisily. With a sigh I released the catch and threw a sheet over microscopes and camera. Already that morning I had been interrupted by several tenacious reporters, and fully expected that this was another representative of the Press. Instead, a tall, supple form slipped through the doorway and a deep, musical voice drawled :

"Say, you seem as fond of barricading yourself in your lair as any apache who fears a police raid. Your concierge said, 'Not at home', but his grin gave the game away."

I tried to keep a straight face, but there was no resisting Bannister's cheerful sarcasm, and with a smile of welcome I pushed cigarettes and whisky, the latter in a bottle labelled "Poison", towards him, and pointed to a chair.

"Always glad to see you, Jim," I said, "but Lebrun is away on holiday, and Dufresne wants my report before five. Anyway, you've not called just for a chat : what is it ?"

"Nothing much, I'm afraid. The days of interesting crimes are past. The police are becoming too efficient. A French Canadian named Pierre Blanquard, who was for ten years head cashier in a Cleveland bank, the Ohio Equitable, lately got in with a dangerous crowd, it appears, and as a result absconded with a large sum in cash. Pinkerton's have cabled informing me that he was traced to New York and that he is now believed to be on board the *Ville de Brest*, which should arrive at Cherbourg on Friday. That gives us two days. I have just arranged with Dufresne for several men to assist me when she berths. I thought you might like to run down with me also."



"Why?" I asked in surprise. "It seems a very ordinary case."

"Oh, the fellow may interest you. He'll probably show fight. He is a reckless devil. Absolutely ran wild before he vamoosed. He comes of one of the few remaining families of real old '*voyageurs*'. Father owned miles of timber, but gambled everything away. He once killed a six-foot lumber-jack with his fists because the man pulled a gun on him. And the grandfather held a Hudson Bay fort alone for a week against twenty Indians. You don't think I'd come for help in getting this man otherwise, do you?"

"Well," I replied, smiling, "it wouldn't be like you, although your arrest would be quite illegal if you played a lone hand. The *Ville de Brest* is a French ship, and Cherbourg——"

"I know that," Bannister interrupted, "but a couple of local gendarmes would put me square with the law. What do you say?"

"Oh, I'll come with pleasure, if only to see you handle this husky."

"Right! The U.S. has officially requested the Sûreté to make the arrest, but a relative—an uncle, I believe—would like the fellow to have a chance of repaying what's left of the money. If he does so the bank won't prosecute; that's why my office cabled to me."

We shook hands on that, and Bannister withdrew. When, some hours later, I carried my report to M. Dufresne, he said:

"I am motoring to Cherbourg with Bannister on Friday. I want to see this Canadian gunman, as your American friend calls him. The local *commissaire* is a friend of mine, and won't object. I have arranged for a seat in the car for you also, so be ready at eight. The steamer is expected to get in about noon, but two detectives will go on board before she makes fast. New York has cabled that the wanted cashier bought a first-class ticket as Marius Reval. Their description of the man is vague, but they are sending his photograph. They have, however, given us the classification numbers of his fingerprints. It appears that the Cleveland Bank kept photographs and prints of all their employees. A wise precaution."

"But doesn't the boat call at Southampton first?" I asked.

"No, the *Ville de Brest* comes straight to Cherbourg when there are no passengers for England. The mails are transhipped at sea to a tug; the British authorities have been warned in case the fellow tries to land or jump overboard. The captain will be informed also, but, as I understand it, Mr. Bannister wishes to give the man time to make restitution before he is actually arrested. Quite irregular, of course, but the American police have agreed to the arrangement, so I'm willing to oblige your friend."

We arrived shortly before noon on Friday, just as the steamer was signalled, fully expecting to find Pierre Blanquard, alias Reval, in his cabin with the detectives who had met the *Ville de Brest* in a police launch; but the moment we passed the cordon of gendarmes and mounted the gangway we perceived that something unusual had occurred. The chief officer was waiting for us with our men, and requested M. Dufresne to come at once to the Captain's cabin. After a hurried greeting, Captain Le Cap, a grizzled, taciturn Breton, held out a sheet of paper.

"Monsieur Reval committed suicide," he said quietly. "He was seen just after eight bells—midnight to you landsmen—on Wednesday, for the last time. He had spent the evening in the smoking-room with a passenger named Etienne Planier, and was heard by the steward to say: 'I'm turning in, I've some letters to write, but I'll give you that book if you'll come to my stateroom.'"

"The two men left by the port side. Smoking-room is forrard, and has a door to port and starboard. Thursday morning, when the bath steward knocked at number fourteen, Reval's stateroom, there was no answer. The door was hooked back and the cabin empty. On his bunk, pinned to the pillow, was this letter. Nothing has been touched—I locked the cabin immediately. The ship was searched from cabins to foc'sle and even down to the stokehold. Reval must have jumped overboard some time during the night. The look-out reported that he fancied he heard a splash about four bells, but we've had some rough weather and fog, and, since there was no cry of any kind, he attached no importance to it."

"Is there a buoy missing, or anything bulky that might have kept him afloat?" Dufresne enquired sharply, taking the letter.

The captain shook his head. "Nothing; I thought of that. He may, of course, have had a cork belt in his trunk; I understand Reval was only a purser's name,\* and that the man was to have been arrested."

"Did you tell anyone that?"

The captain's face flushed angrily. "Only the wireless officer and I knew, and neither of us would spread such information. I don't like police coming on my ship, anyway," and on the words he turned and walked to his bunk and sat down.

The letter which the captain had given Dufresne had been written on the vessel's headed paper with a fountain pen, for the writing was continuous and even. The style was curiously stilted and formal:

*To the captain and the port authorities at Cherbourg.*

*When I have written this letter I intend to climb up the davits to one of the boats and jump overboard. No doubt the police already know that I stole ten thousand dollars from the bank where I worked for so many years. During these four days on board I have had time to think, and I realize that I was a fool to imagine I could escape. I hope that since I shall be dead my real name will not be given to the papers. It is one of the oldest and most honourable in Canada. Why I became a thief is my concern, but I'm man enough to prefer drowning to prison. Let no one be accused of my death.*

*Marius Reval.*

"Do you know if this is the man's handwriting?" Dufresne asked, addressing the captain.

"I cannot say, but no doubt the fellow's family will be able to tell you that."

"And the money he stole? Is that on board?"

"Nothing in his cabin has been touched," the captain replied testily; "I told you so. Here is the key. The purser informed me that Reval gave him a bulky envelope containing

money to put in the safe when he came on board, but withdrew it again two days later, so it's probably in his trunk. How about my passengers now? They are impatient to go ashore."

"I am compelled to hold an enquiry first. Let them come into the smoking room one by one, then when I have questioned them they can land. Please let your officers see to it that no one slips away. My men will stand at the gangway and collect the permits with their names which each passenger will receive from me. The customs shall search their baggage carefully."

No one was able to give us any useful information until we came to Etienne Planier, the man who had been drinking with the Canadian on the night he disappeared. He related that although they had become very friendly during the voyage, Reval had been extremely reticent about his affairs; nevertheless, he had sensed that some secret trouble preyed on his mind. There had been nothing unusual in his manner however on Wednesday, when they separated after a last drink.

"Where was this drink taken?" Dufresne asked. "In the smoking-room?"

"No, sir," Planier replied after some hesitation. "Now you mention it, he had a bottle of whisky in his cabin. I went there for a book he had offered to lend me, and he poured out a night-cap—so he called it."

"Where is the book?" Dufresne questioned further. The man fidgeted uneasily. "I have it in my bag. I never thought to give it up—since Reval had gone."

"And did you stay long in his cabin after the drink?"

"No, sir, I left almost immediately, and I heard the snap of the bolt as he shut the door."

Dufresne turned to Bannister and, with a curious, intent look, said, "Please go with Monsieur Planier, get the book from his bag, and come back with him."

Bannister nodded and left, to return a few minutes later carrying a paper-bound novel, a queer expression on his face. Dufresne glanced at the book, then, when he had taken the address of Planier, he dismissed him without remark, but hardly had the man gone when he called sharply to Inspector

Louys, "Follow that fellow. Don't lose sight of him, report at headquarters, but let someone take your place when you've seen him to his house. I'll send an officer to relieve you. If he doesn't go to this address he's given, send a gendarme to inform me."

Louys nodded and disappeared.

"Now, Monsieur Bannister," Dufresne asked, "what did you discover?"

"Well," Bannister drawled, "it may not have any bearing on the case, but first he couldn't find the right key to open the bag, and then he hesitated for some minutes before deciding which book to give me."

Dufresne raised his eyebrows. "I don't see——"

"No, neither do I as yet, but it seemed strange."

"Well—well—the fellow was nervous—he was the last person to see Reval alive. Come, we'll examine the cabin now. Ask the purser to send the steward to me there."

There was only one trunk and an open suitcase containing clothes and linen. These were all neatly arranged, and had certainly not been touched since they were packed. There appeared to be nothing in the place which could help us in our investigation. Suddenly Dufresne looked at me and said:

"Does it not strike you as strange? There is only one tumbler in the rack, and it doesn't smell of spirits. Nor is there any sign of a bottle of whisky. Moreover, not a penny in his clothes or baggage. Surely, if remorse at having robbed his bank caused the man to jump overboard he would have left the money behind?"

"That fits in with a vague feeling I had," Bannister said thoughtfully. "I couldn't define it before—but there is something abnormal about this suicide. The Canadian was not the kind of man who would drown himself. I guess he and Planier fixed it up between them, and Blanquard, alias Reval, either had a lifebelt and took food and drink along, or else he's still hidden on the ship."

"Why should the man have been fool enough to take anyone into his confidence if he meant to hide?" Dufresne objected. "There was no need for that at all. As for going overboard

with a lifebelt, well, what chance would he have of being picked up before he died of exposure?"

"I quite appreciate your points; but why did Planier lie about the whisky?"

"I cannot tell you yet; perhaps he murdered the Canadian, robbed him of his money, and threw him overboard."

"That's out of the question," I broke in. "You are forgetting the letter. If the cashier was murdered he wouldn't have written to inform the captain he intended to commit suicide."

At that moment the purser entered, followed by a beady-eyed squat Japanese dressed in a steward's uniform.

"Did you ever see Reval's handwriting?" Dufresne asked at once.

"Yes, sir," the steward cried shrilly. "He always write list of breakfast dishes the night before. He take his breakfast in bed, and he also write his name on the deck-chair label. A little moment, I get them."

There was no doubt possible: the pencilled menus and the words "Marius Reval" on the cardboard tab were in the same hand as the formal letter to the captain. For a while Dufresne walked up and down in deep thought, then, suddenly coming to a decision, he exclaimed, turning to me: "That letter certainly makes the murder theory impossible. But it does not explain why the money is gone. Of course he may have spent most of it before he came on board; we don't know how much was in that envelope he gave to the purser. It's not likely, however—ten thousand dollars is a large sum. There remain only two solutions: either the Canadian really committed suicide and left the money behind, and someone—Planier for instance—saw him go out and stole it, or, what I believe to be the true explanation, the fellow is hiding somewhere. Go and telephone to Bertillon. This thing cuts deeper than we thought. Ask him to come if he possibly can. Explain what we have found. Meanwhile I'll lock this cabin and that of Planier's and set a guard at the customs' gates. I'll try to persuade the captain to let me go over the ship again. Hurry, please."

Fortunately Bertillon was at headquarters, and my description of the case interested him at once.

"I can just catch the three-twenty express," he said, "which gets to Cherbourg at six. Tell the captain to leave only one gangway down. Examine all the cargo as the derricks fetch it up. I fancy Dufresne is right, the fellow is still on board. It's a faked suicide. He foresaw the possibility of arrest. From your description of the type of man we are dealing with, he would stick at nothing. Not a single member of the crew is to be given shore leave until I arrive. I'll obtain an order from the *procureur* to enforce this. Meanwhile, get as good a description of Blanquard's personality as possible from the steward."

Dufresne sighed with relief when I reported Bertillon's decision.

"I'm not a bit jealous," he said grimly. "My brains are not in the same class with his. Ordinary cases I'll handle, but not this type. I'm glad he's coming."

Captain Le Cap was openly hostile, and resented our continued presence on board, but a telegram, evidently from his owners, which was brought on board by a harbour official, compelled him to give the necessary orders. Two gendarmes were stationed at the gangway, and Bannister tested the fastening on each bulky case before it was swung to shore, whilst I assisted Dufresne in making another very thorough but fruitless search of the vessel.

We were all glad to see the spare form of Bertillon appear on deck soon after six. He at once took charge of the investigation in his usual crisp manner.

"Call the steward who waited on the Canadian," he said after a hasty greeting. "I want to know the fellow's impression of the man."

"Him big," the Japanese said in his shrill broken French. "A fighter—what we call a Samurai—big muscles. Fair hair and moustache, blue eyes, little wisp of beard under lower lip like goatee, but smaller. But nice voice—never rude to me."

"Fair haired?" Dufresne ejaculated in surprise. "Why, the New York police described him as dark!"

Bertillon stared at his colleague.

"Didn't you find out what Reval looked like immediately ?" he asked, frowning.

"Why, no—this letter mentioned the stolen money ; it never entered my head that Reval might not be our man."

Bertillon refrained from further remark and continued his interrogation of the steward. "This other man, Planier, what was he like ?"

"Also tall, but very dark and clean shave. Bad temper ; sick when ship roll."

"Oh, and was the Canadian a good sailor ?"

"Yes, eat plenty. Every morning big breakfast."

"Did you take a glass away from Monsieur Reval's cabin after he had gone, or a bottle of whisky."

The steward shook his head vigorously and made a clicking noise with his tongue. "Touch nothing. Captain lock cabin at once."

Bertillon rose, and we followed him to stateroom fourteen. For a while he stood looking around at every object as though trying to visualize what had happened there on the night of the presumed tragedy. Then he stepped quickly to the open trunk and began lifting out clothes and linen, separating them into orderly little heaps.

"Next to a man's books, his clothes, if they have been worn, are an excellent guide to his character. Hullo, look at these neck-ties !"

Bannister craned forward eagerly, but his face expressed disappointment.

"I see nothing unusual there, chief," he replied.

"No ?" Bertillon replied with a queer smile. "Yet they are very peculiar. The fellow was evidently a bit of a dandy. Most of his ties were bought in Cleveland, but several are from New York—the maker's name is on them, and their colours are quite different from the others. He was a man with taste and a sensitive eye. Suggestive, eh ? Well, well, let's see if there is anything to be learned from his soiled linen."

For some minutes Bertillon examined the crumpled collars and shirts with a powerful lens. Twice I saw him pluck some



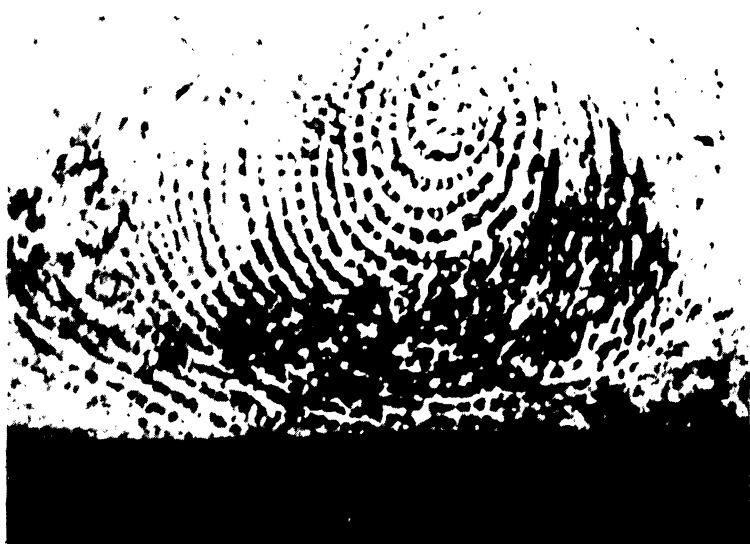
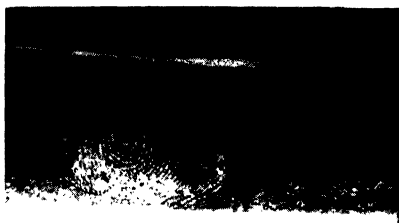
tiny threads from them with tweezers, which he placed in an envelope. Then he walked to the toilet cupboard. The basin appeared to give him great satisfaction. It was of metal, and made to tilt up. Bertillon lifted it and scraped some dry soap-suds from the edge of the waste pipe with a knife, which he then spread out on the glass slide of his portable microscope. We watched him in silence while he adjusted the lens. Always those uncanny powers which appeared to guide him unerringly to the true solution of a complex puzzle filled me with awe and admiration. His sarcastic smile made it apparent that already he had discovered something definite. Placing lenses and slide carefully on a seat, he next scrutinized the glass shelf beneath the toilet mirror. Again he gave a little cry of pleasure.

"That metal basin is polished. Did you powder the edge where a man would grasp it to empty the contents?" he asked, turning to me. "No? Well, do so, there'll be fingerprints there."

He was right, and I was able to transfer three clear fingerprints to gelatine paper. Meanwhile Bertillon's eyes continued to rove round the cabin. Abruptly, as I held out the result of my work, he sprang eagerly forward and pulled open a locker. In it were two brushes, a comb, and a safety razor. After scrutinizing each object in turn he unscrewed the razor and detached the blade. "Pack it and come along," he said. "We'll have a look at Planier's cabin now."

It was in all points similar to the stateroom we had left, except for the absence of luggage and the evident signs of hasty departure. When Bertillon had examined washstand, basin, and glass shelf, I at once sprayed the metal rim with our special powder and handed him the adhesive paper slips, on which were several faint marks. These he carried to the light for comparison with those obtained from Blanquard's cabin. Then he turned with an air of finality and said:

"Planier and the Canadian were confederates, that's certain. I was at first inclined to believe that Planier killed and robbed this Blanquard and threw his body overboard, but the letter disposes of that theory. Furthermore, the



BLANQUARD'S FINGERPRINT AS IT WAS FOUND ON THE RIM OF THE BASIN IN  
PLANIER'S CABIN, PROVING THAT THE CANADIAN HAD BEEN THERE

1. THE ORIGINAL

2. ENLARGED



Canadian was in this room twenty-four hours ago, so he did not jump overboard in mid-Atlantic. The suicide is a fake. He was either hidden in this cabin or he had discovered a safe retreat to which Planier probably smuggled food and drink. That would explain why Blanquard was driven to confide in him. It remains to be seen whether the man is still in hiding on board or whether some scheme was concocted whereby he could get ashore once the ship was near land. If he had been clever he would have left some of the money and stated in his letter that the remainder had been spent. Well, they always forget something. One thing I cannot understand yet : why was the book mentioned in the presence of the steward if they were confederates, and why did Planier tell that lie about a last drink ?"

"Was it a lie ?" I asked. "Perhaps it slipped out because they did drink together, and it was then they made their arrangements."

Bertillon knitted his brows and his eyes assumed a vacant look. Suddenly he started as loud shouts and running footsteps sounded in the passage ; the door was thrown violently open and a sailor appeared, followed by a gendarme.

"Someone slid down one of the mooring-ropes," the seaman gasped. "We didn't see him until too late. He got away."

"Warn the dock police at once and telephone a description of the fellow to all the gendarme stations," Bertillon said, turning to one of our men. "Here it is : Tall, clean shaven, dark close-cropped hair, pale complexion and blue eyes. Don't stare like that"—as the detective halted in astonishment. "Hurry now !"

"I don't understand," Dufresne exclaimed when the officer had gone. "The American cable described Blanquard as a dark man, but the steward said this fellow was fair."

Bertillon waved his hand impatiently. "I know he did. Blanquard wore a wig. I pointed out the change in the colour of his ties. The old ones are such as a dark man would wear ; those bought in New York are mostly shades of light blue. That was my starting-point. Why should a man of taste suddenly change ? And on the glass shelf I found the

marks made by a bottle which contained spirit gum ; some of it ran down the outside, probably from the brush in the cork. The fair hairs I picked from his dirty collars are similar to those on the brush and comb ; they are without roots, and unquestionably false hair. Moreover, the stubble of beard in the dry flecks of shaving-soap on the edge of the waste pipe, and the traces on the razor, are black with a tinge of red at the thicker ends near the roots."

"How did you know the fellow had recently been here in Planier's cabin ?" Bannister asked.

"Because I also found smears of a similar reddish-black stubble in his waste pipe, besides several longer hairs, totally different in texture, which evidently belonged to Planier. But the final proof is provided by the Canadian's fingerprints. See—the index finger has a tiny scar which cuts through the double spiral. That same scar is present on the transfers from Planier's basin. The inference is that the Canadian shaved in this cabin. He would not have been able to do that unless he was hidden here, and, since the basins are normally cleaned every day, he was here twenty-four hours ago. I imagine Planier pretended to be seasick and remained in his bunk to prevent the steward from prying. We may as well go now. If the Canadian is not caught I have an idea he will try to reach Paris. Planier must be carefully shadowed, and, if necessary, he shall be arrested and questioned."

Greatly to the captain's relief, we sent the gendarmes away and informed him that we should no longer need to interfere with the ship's routine. He looked curious, but refrained from asking questions. When we arrived at the Quai des Orfèvres a laconic and somewhat flippant message from Louys already awaited us.

*Planier went straight to his house in the Rue Jeanne d'Arc. Wife very handsome—fatted calf killed. House illuminated ; sounds of revelry. No visitors as yet.*

"*Bien entendu*," Bertillon commented after reading the note to us. "No visitors as yet. But there will be at least *one*

soon." Then, turning to me: "Go with Rousseau early in the morning to relieve Louys. Be sure Blanquard will not come openly. Watch the rear of the house and the roofs. I am cabling to America for full information regarding both men. Good night! Report regularly, and don't relax your vigilance for a single minute."

Bannister, who still hoped that he might prevail on the cashier to give up the stolen money, came with us. Rousseau had, as usual, taken a fast car with a dummy taximeter, because not only would he be less noticeable disguised as a chauffeur, but the car would give him the means for instant pursuit. We found Louys, dressed in white overalls, busy on a light scaffolding, with two of his men repainting a sign over a café.

He joined us inside and reported that no one had been seen entering the house during the night. The landlord grinned broadly when he perceived Rousseau, and fished out a dusty bottle of Volnay from under the counter.

"I thought it curious that your friend should offer to repaint my sign for ten francs," he remarked with a chuckle. "At first I fancied he was after the notary's safe on the ground floor opposite. But I know Inspector Rousseau of old, and I don't think he has forgotten my Volnay 1909, *hein*, Brigadier? Trust me to keep mum. I read about the suicide on the ship."

"Eh?" Louys exclaimed. "What's that to do with us?"

"Oh, we get to hear many bits of gossip in our trade, and I can put two and two together. The concierge from number sixteen comes here for his wine; he was bursting with the story of what happened on the *Ville de Brest*. He heard of it from Monsieur Planier, who, it appears, is quite changed since he came back from America. He and his wife were always quarrelling before he went away—and now, a real lovers' meeting and a second honeymoon. Champagne, oysters and *foie gras*. They can't bear to be separated a minute."

Rousseau looked thoughtful a moment, then he beckoned to the loquacious innkeeper.

"See here, Jules, you knew Planier before he went to America—you're sure it's he?"

Jules scratched his chin reflectively. "*Oui, oui*—it's Etienne Planier right enough, but he's altered. He was a surly brute before, now he is pleasant to everyone, and it's '*Bon jour, Jules*' when he sees me. And his taste in drinks has changed also. Formerly he sent across for cognac by the dozen. Since he came back he's bought only burgundy and champagne."

We looked at each other in silence for many minutes.

"I wonder," said Bannister at last. "That's a new idea."

"Rubbish," Louys interrupted. "Why on earth should Planier forfeit his right to return home for another man?"

"Well, well," Rousseau murmured, "we of the Sûreté have seen some queer things, and dollar bills are very persuasive."

"But, man, his wife would not be deceived. She would realize immediately that a stranger had taken her husband's place. I questioned the concierge who carried the luggage upstairs. He heard her exclaim, 'At last, my dear Etienne.' No——"

"She may have been warned in time," I interrupted.

"She only received a telegram with the words, '*Arriving five-thirty. Etienne.*' Do you think I overlooked that? You must put such an idea out of your head. You heard what the landlord said: they are like a pair of lovers."

"That's just it—and formerly they did nothing but quarrel," Bannister remarked. "I shall submit this theory to Bertillon, anyway."

Louys shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"Look, there is the fellow now," he exclaimed abruptly. "Hulloa, he's hurt his arm!"

The man we had been discussing had come out of the building opposite and stood looking up and down the street as though uncertain which way to go. His right hand was bandaged and his arm suspended from a black silk sling. Suddenly he crossed the road with rapid strides towards the inn which sheltered us. Fortunately the landlord had been watching also and met him at the door. With a sweep of his hand Rousseau seized the bottle on our table and we dashed into the back room. Not a moment too soon, for as we closed the door Planier entered and gave a sharp, intent look about the place.

"He's no fool," Rousseau growled in my ear. "Our glasses will tell him nothing, but this half-empty bottle would have betrayed us. I'll slip out through the rear and follow in my taxi."

Planier only stayed to give an order for wine, and a few minutes later we heard the hum of the Brigadier's car as he started in pursuit. Jules cautiously opened the door behind which we crouched.

"Your man wanted to hire Rousseau's taxi," he said with a grin. "He thought the chauffeur was here having a drink. So I told him he'd gone to get some cigarettes. Better let me know what's wrong; I may be able to help."

"Did you ask how he hurt his arm?" Bannister queried, evading the innkeeper's question.

"Yes, but he was very vague about it. A sprain caused by moving some furniture, he said casually."

"We were lucky; if he'd seen us it would have spoiled everything, for he would certainly have recognized us as the men who were with Dufresne on the liner. In future we must alter our appearance."

It was about an hour later when Mme. Planier came hurriedly out, hailed a cab, and drove away, followed by Louys, who had also a car handy. It was my first glimpse of the wife—a handsome brunette with the olive skin and black hair of the south. I expressed my surprise at her youthful appearance.

"Oh, she is only a girl," the innkeeper exclaimed, proud to display his knowledge of other people's affairs. "The concierge said she was nineteen when they married. And the husband went to America soon after. She has lived here all alone these five years."

Since here appeared to be no immediate need for my presence, I left Bannister with the detectives and returned to headquarters to make my report. Dufresne and Bertillon were discussing a telephone message from Rousseau which had already come through.

"Planier was followed to the Crédit Général," Bertillon said when I had related what had happened at the café. "He wished to withdraw most of his money, but, owing to the bandaged hand, could only sign his name with difficulty. The



manager of the bank insisted on the presence of a witness, although he knew Planier well, so our man sent for his wife. I spoke to the cashier on the 'phone. He tells me the signature appears to be genuine, but shaky."

There was something queer in the way my chief said this, and my face must have shown surprise, for he added grimly :

"Your American friend was the first to have an inkling of the truth. It's an interesting problem. If I read it aright the Canadian bribed Planier to let him take his place. By the descriptions I have received the two men looked much alike, and probably this coincidence suggested the scheme. It's a *lucky* thing for Blanquard that he made the mistake of leaving none of the money behind. We might have accepted the suicide theory and there would have been no investigation."

"Lucky?" I exclaimed.

"Yes," I said, "lucky. Blanquard certainly didn't know that Planier had good reasons for accepting the proposed substitution for his own sake. *He is wanted for murder!* We just had a long cable from New York. He poisoned his partner. The crime was discovered ten days ago, but it was only by a freak of chance that the police finally obtained conclusive proof against Planier. He must have felt very safe to have shipped under his real name. But that haunting fear which obsesses all criminals caused him to dread the arrival at Cherbourg. It's a devilish callous plot. Blanquard played right into his hands. Planier must have schooled the Canadian well, informed him of every little detail of his wife's habits, and counted on the difference an absence of five years would naturally make. He evidently reasoned that if, after all, his guilt had been discovered and there was a warrant out for his arrest, Blanquard would be taken in his place to America, since he had voluntarily stepped into his shoes, and he would thus be warned in time and able to flee disguised and under an assumed name, leaving the Canadian to extricate himself as best he could. Yet there is something I don't understand. How could the Canadian expect an honest man to take his place and risk arrest? And if the man he chose also had reasons to fear the police, what benefit did he expect to derive from the

change? We've not got to the bottom of this business yet. By the way, the man who slipped ashore has been caught. It was only a Swedish sailor who had been a stowaway and was terrified at our presence on board; so where the real Planier got to is also still a mystery."

"But the wife," I objected; "she recognized her husband at once. Their love-making is the talk of the neighbourhood. They could not be sure she would be deceived so easily. Besides, what husband would allow another man——"

Bertillon's mocking smile caused me to cease abruptly.

"He only married the girl for her money, and doesn't care a fig about her, but he *does* care for his own skin. A callous blackguard. We shall not arrest Blanquard yet; Planier is the man we want. This withdrawal of all the money from the bank may be part of the plot. If so, he will come to get it. But, somehow, I fancy Blanquard is what Bannister calls 'double-crossing' his confederate—trying to steal his wife and his money. Otherwise there was no need for the trick of the bandaged hand. Planier could have filled in and signed the cheques in advance. When he finds his money gone, he'll be raving mad and walk straight into our net. Go back to the house in the Rue Jeanne d'Arc. Take all the men you want and have several cars in waiting. We must not risk losing this fellow if he does come."

I returned at once to my post and found a convenient doorway from which the windows of Planier's apartment were clearly visible. The night passed slowly. Soon after twelve all lights were extinguished; one by one the iron frontages of the numerous cafés came down with rattle and clash, the noisy groups of men and women dispersed, and the street fell silent except for an occasional fussy, hooting cab. I had just looked at my watch—it was two o'clock—and was preparing to unscrew the cup of my vacuum flask for a sip of coffee, when Bannister slipped noiselessly into my corner and, seizing my arm, pointed to one of the windows.

"Someone is there," he whispered, "using an electric torch. Look—see that moving circle? Quick, give the alarm."

I raised my lamp and flashed it to both sides of the street;

then, throwing the beams before me, I ran to the house, followed by Bannister. Three sharp blasts from a whistle informed me that my signal had been seen.

"That's a fool idea," my friend growled. "Who was the idiot who used a police whistle? Why couldn't he sound a motor horn? Look, the light's gone out."

I pressed the entrance bell and shouted a vague name as we raced past the concierge's lodge and up the stairs.

Rousseau and his men quickly joined us at the door of Planier's flat, and I was about to knock, when a loud slam followed by several smart taps sounded overhead.

"The skylight!" Rousseau cried. "Quick, after him! I'll warn the cyclist police!"

The usual ladder led to the roof, and we saw immediately that someone had just passed that way, but all our efforts to lift the trap-door were unavailing. The cunning intruder had evidently heard the whistle or perhaps even seen my light, and had driven several wedges between flap and frame to prevent pursuit. Nor were our colleagues more successful. Although detectives had been posted in every street in a circle about the house, the mysterious visitor had somehow escaped.

We finally decided that Rousseau, who had not been with us at Cherbourg, should ring up Planier's flat and inform him that a strange light had been observed from the street. As I slipped quickly down the stairs I saw that the door was opened by the man we now believed to be the Canadian, fully dressed, and obviously greatly disturbed. Rousseau entered at once, but remained only a few minutes.

"He said someone got in with a duplicate key and opened a desk in the front room," was his comment when he rejoined us. "The fellow was anxious to be rid of me, and averred that nothing had been taken, but the woman spoiled it all by exclaiming, 'Why, yes, your cheque-book was in that desk, and it's gone now.' He tried to look surprised, but it was a poor bit of acting. Finally he said, 'I shall inform the bank the moment they open, monsieur, so it doesn't matter.' The chief is probably right. The man upstairs is Blanquard, and he's stolen his confederate's money."

When I related our adventure to Bertillon in the morning he became strangely agitated.

"The true solution of this problem still eludes me—the bits of the puzzle don't fit somehow. Planier had transferred all his money from New York to this account in Paris several weeks before he left. Therefore the cheque-book was of vital importance to him, and it is inconceivable that he should have parted with it. According to our laws his name must be stamped on every slip, and to withdraw all or part of his money without such authenticated cheques would be very difficult. How did Blanquard get hold of the cheque-book? Why should Planier have given it to him? He could easily have sent someone to the bank if he feared to go in person. Or, if he did give it to his accomplice for some extraordinary reason, why should he now break in and steal his own property? We're in a fog, from which only one thing emerges: Planier obviously doesn't know yet that the money has been withdrawn. I'm going to apply for a warrant. We'll see what the *juge d'instruction* will get from the Canadian. But he shall be arrested as Planier. Wait a second."

The telephone had rung insistently whilst my chief was speaking. He listened with expressionless face a moment and then merely said, "Thank you" and replaced the receiver. For a while he gazed at me with unseeing eyes, then he sighed and remarked:

"That was the bank. A woman presented a cheque just now for the exact amount which had been standing to Etienne Planier's credit. The signature was bold, firm, and unquestionably his. The cashier confiscated the cheque, and the woman's name and address were taken. One of our men, posted at the *Crédit Général*, has followed her. Good work! So those two points are cleared up. It *was* Planier stole the cheque-book last night, and he did so because he was not aware his confederate already had the money. We'll be present when Blanquard is questioned by the *juge*. There is a want of logic about the case which irritates me. I'll send for you when we have the fellow."

I tried in vain to settle down to ordinary routine work

during the hours which followed, my thoughts inevitably reverted to the problem of this Canadian and the pretty woman I had perceived coming from the house the previous day. Late in the afternoon Rousseau arrived, looking grim and worried.

"Blanquard is downstairs, guarded by two gendarmes. I am glad I don't often have to arrest such a man. I expected trouble, and sent the concierge to knock at the door. The woman opened it, and before she knew what was happening Louys and I were inside. Blanquard was in the front room. With a growl of rage he tore a chair apart as though it was paper, and stood at bay ready to brain us. Fortunately the woman saved the situation. She rushed between us and threw her arms around his neck—and—well, then we had him. But the despair in both their faces was terrible to see. I thought we'd never prise her loose. She sobbed as though her heart would break. Strange, isn't it? They only met for the first time a few days ago—so Bertillon thinks—yet they appear to love each other passionately. Come along, the *juge* will be ready for him soon. Madame Planier insisted on following us. It's just as well; she may be wanted."

Monsieur Duperret, the examining magistrate, had evidently gathered all the details of our investigation from Bertillon, for he wasted no time in preliminaries when the prisoner was led into his office.

"You are Etienne Planier?" he asked crisply.

"That is my name," the man replied in a dull voice.

"You are sure there is no mistake?"

"Of course I'm sure. I should like to know, however, why I am arrested in this brutal fashion? It is quite irregular. Your men did not even tell me of what I am accused."

For a moment the *juge* looked steadily at his opponent, then in a loud, clear voice, he replied: "Etienne Planier, *you are arrested for murder.*"

At the terrible words the colour receded from the man's face, his hands twitched convulsively, and great beads of perspiration gathered on his brow. He appeared incapable of speech. With closed eyes he lay back in his chair, struggling

for composure; then his muscles tensed as though he were about to leap at the magistrate and he cried hoarsely, "It's not true; this is some trick! I've only been in France a few days."

"We know that—you fled from New York because of the crime you committed. The American police have made an application for extradition. Since you are a Frenchman, you may oppose it. As you see, my clerk is not taking down your replies. There are reasons why I wish to question you informally first, otherwise you would have been allowed to choose a counsel at once. Tell me, why did you shoot the girl?"

"I—I—must have been mad. I was jealous—I remember only vaguely——

"*Vraiment?* Then let me tell you that Etienne Planier is accused of poisoning his partner—a *man*. Come, suppose you tell the truth? You see that, fortunately for you, we are convinced you are not Planier—that you knew nothing of what the man had done when you assumed his name. Are you eager to go to the electric chair for him? You are Pierre Blanquard, and the worst that can happen to you is a sentence for theft."

The magistrate's words fell like so many resounding hammer-blows, although he spoke softly. To our astonishment the prisoner shrank back with a muttered, "Good God, what shall I do?" and, as M. Duperret concluded, he cried loudly:

"You are wrong, I am not Blanquard. I deny it. Send me back to America. I shall not oppose the extradition."

The magistrate turned to the gendarme behind his chair and quickly whispered a few words. The man left the room and we sat waiting silently in tense attitudes. I guessed that he had gone to fetch the woman, and I was not mistaken. A minute later she entered, pale as death, her beautiful eyes wide with fear. At sight of the man's convulsed face she sank into a chair with a pitiful moan.

"Oh, what has he done, monsieur?" she asked brokenly, appealing to the *juge*.

"If the prisoner is your husband, Etienne Planier, he is a murderer, and will probably be executed—but is he Planier?" M. Duperret added quietly. "You do not reply. And you,

monsieur, do you realize that you are shielding a callous and desperate criminal, who used you as a catspaw? Come, let us end this farce. Why not tell the truth? It will make things so much easier for you. We shall capture Planier, anyway—even now our men may have him.”

“Impossible!” the harassed man yelled wildly. “Yes, I am Pierre Blanquard. This sweet girl is not my wife, but she is blameless—she believed me to be her husband——”

The *juge* looked at the woman, who had risen and, with tears streaming down her cheeks, was now kneeling beside the prisoner, gently caressing his hair.

“No,” she sobbed, “I knew all the time. But I loved you from the first day, and I know you love me. Do you think I did not realize when I heard your voice and felt your arms round me that even five years could not have so changed a heartless blackguard?”

“Why did you say, ‘Impossible’ just now?” the judge interrupted, taking advantage of the man’s emotion.

“Because Planier is dead—I killed him, and I am glad. When you told me of Planier’s crime I realized that either way I was lost, so I tried to save Viola—his wife—the shame of knowing that I’m not her husband. I truly thought she had been deceived. Planier might have been my twin brother in appearance. I’m no good anyway—the first of a fine family to go wrong. I got in with a lot of crooks, gambled, got into debt, and stole my bank’s money. Like a fool, I thought I could get away by wearing a disguise, but on the ship I had time to think of the consequences, and cast about for a way to avoid arrest in case I had been traced. First I meant to fake a suicide and to hide until after the boat had made fast, but, as ill-luck would have it, Planier was a fellow passenger, and I was at once struck by the uncanny resemblance between us. He was a beast who did nothing but brag of his money and what he was going to do in Paris. I soon learned all about his affairs, his wife, where he lived, everything. I made up my mind to change places with him. How was I to know that he too feared the police, that he had murder on his conscience? When we were four days out I invited him to a last drink in

my cabin, intending to drug him. Whilst I was getting a bottle from my locker I happened to look in the mirror and saw him pour something from a tiny phial into one of the glasses. Manifestly he was as bad as I was, and meant to rob and murder me. That made it easy. I pretended to have no corkscrew, and whilst he prized the cork out with his pocket knife I gave the tray a twist, so that he drank his own dope. It was strong stuff whatever it was, for ten minutes later he collapsed fast asleep. I dressed him in my clothes, carried him to the side, and dropped him overboard. He was no light weight, but I'm very strong. I had purposely made the steward familiar with my handwriting, so that there should be no mistake. I wrote a letter for the captain, which I pinned to my pillow, threw bottle, glass, and my false hair over the side, and went to Planier's cabin. The next day the news of Marius Reval's suicide had spread all over the ship and I was Etienne Planier. I felt no remorse, for I was convinced that Planier had intended to do exactly what I had done, in order to steal my money and to change places with me. I just happened to be first ; and when I saw his wife and remembered how he had spoken of her, I was even glad. I soon discovered that the scoundrel had treated her shamefully . . ."

The man's voice trailed off, and for several minutes there was silence.

"What did you do with the money you withdrew from the bank ?" the *juge* asked at last.

"It is at the Crédit Lyonnais in his wife's name. I've not touched a penny of it. I found out that it really belonged to her."

"And the money you stole ?"

"I cabled it to the Cleveland Equitable bank two days ago. You see, since I learned to love this woman I've changed. I meant to go straight and to make her happy."

The magistrate whistled reflectively.

"*Vraiment ?* Then, as a matter of fact, only a charge of attempted murder, with attenuating circumstances, can be brought against you, for Planier is alive and in Paris. It was he stole your cheque-book."

"What ?" Blanquard cried, starting to his feet. "That's



absurd—we were two days from Cherbourg, and he was unconscious when I threw him into the water.”

“Nevertheless, I am convinced he was picked up. Probably the cold revived him. How otherwise do you explain this?” and he placed the cheque signed by Planier, which the cashier had refused to pay, before him. Mme. Planier came to the table and examined the writing, then she turned to the Canadian with outstretched hands, crying :

“Monsieur Duperret is right. It was he, then, who forced your desk the other night. That is unquestionably Etienne’s signature. He had a key to the *appartement*. Oh, I don’t know whether I’m glad you didn’t kill him or whether I’m sorry that I am still bound to such a beast by law.”

Before Blanquard could reply, a knock sounded on the door and Bannister came in with eager step. He stopped short at sight of the prisoner. Something of the tragic scene which had been enacted still clung to all of us, and the pale, tear-stained face of the woman told its own tale.

“The Embassy just rang me up,” the American cried. “The Cleveland Bank has been repaid in full, and will not prosecute.”

Duperret nodded. “Pierre Blanquard, alias Reval, has just told us that——”

“Blanquard?” Bannister exclaimed. “So I was right!”

“Yes, this is Pierre Blanquard.”

“Then I guess he is free?”

“No, on the contrary, he must remain a prisoner, for he has confessed to attempted murder,” and in a few curt sentences the *juge* placed the facts before my friend. “So you see,” he concluded, “although the jury will certainly take a very lenient view of it, Blanquard must stand his trial. I count on you, gentlemen,” turning to us, “to lay Planier by the heels quickly.”

Mme. Planier rose with a sigh and, with an appealing look at M. Duperret, prepared to go. My chief said something in an undertone to Louys, who at once conducted the woman to the door and left with her.

Duperret handed a slip of paper to Bertillon. “Have this put in the evening edition of one or two of the principal papers,” he said. “It is just a paragraph reporting the arrest of Etienne

Planier for the presumed murder of a passenger on the liner. It will cause the real Planier to feel quite safe and make him careless. He is desperately in need of money. Who was the woman who presented the cheque?"

"She keeps a shady lodging-house at Montparnasse, but was once a dancer. Probably a former crony of Planier. He had actually slept several nights at her place, but had gone when the detective who followed him from the bank arrived there. We thought it best not to alarm the woman by letting her see she had been followed, so we didn't question her. Planier will think the money is hidden at his *appartement*, and the news of the Canadian's arrest as Etienne Planier, for the murder of the missing passenger, will convince him we've no longer any reason for watching the house. He still has his key, and there is every chance the fellow will try to enter his own home as soon as possible."

Following upon Dufresne's instructions, we again took up our positions outside the house in the Rue Jeanne d'Arc ; but this time, when night came, Bannister and I crouched behind a large chimney near the skylight. We were not going to be caught again by a wedged flap. It was well we did so. About midnight a soft, padding step caused us to peer from our hiding-place in time to see a furtive shape fumble at the wooden frame. There was a sharp snap as the bolt was forced, and the nocturnal visitor disappeared down the opening. Almost immediately a shrill cry came from below. We heard the sounds of a scuffle, a pistol cracked twice, and the man reappeared. We were on him as he knelt beside the skylight and tried to drive home several pieces of wood with the butt of a revolver. Although our advent was quite unexpected, the terrific strength of our opponent broke our first hold, and he had already raised his pistol to fire at my friend, when I jerked his legs from under him, and a moment later he was safely handcuffed. We had at last caught the elusive Planier, and I could not repress a cry of amazement when Rousseau tore away the piece of black cloth which had covered his face. The fellow's resemblance to Blanquard was marvellous. Every feature was the same ; only, whereas the expression

of the Canadian, although reckless and defiant, showed him to be a man with many good instincts, this snarling creature we now held reminded me instantly of a cornered rat. As we dragged him down the ladder, his wife came running from the flat.

At sight of her the fellow's face became convulsed with rage.

"So you gave me away, did you!" he yelled. "I'll kill you for that if I ever get free!"

Terror robbed the woman of the power to speak, but Rousseau seized Planier by the collar and shouted angrily, "Nothing of the kind! She didn't know we were here! As for getting free—don't count on it!"

We immediately conducted our prisoner to the cells, and the following day he was confronted with Blanquard. Thus we learned that the shock of the cold water had indeed revived Planier and he had managed to keep afloat until dawn. A Spanish cargo-boat, bound for Bordeaux, had picked him up and landed him there. He had been delighted, he told us with a sneer, to find himself possessed of Blanquard's clothes and papers, although he guessed the Canadian also had good reasons to fear arrest, for he had spotted the wig and moustache from the first day. But he felt sure that, whatever crime Blanquard had committed, it was not murder. He had intended to steal the Canadian's money and disguise and throw him overboard, thereupon taking his place until they came in sight of land, so that Planier should be reported drowned at sea, for he too had perceived how much they were alike in size and features. He was a powerful swimmer, and had counted on slipping ashore before the ship entered the harbour. But when he read in the papers of the supposed suicide of Reval, and later of the Canadian's arrest as Planier on a charge of murder, he realized that it would be dangerous to linger, and determined to get hold of his money at once and leave France.

Planier was sent back to New York, but died in prison. It was suspected that he had somehow succeeded in obtaining poison. Blanquard was tried in Paris, and escaped with a light sentence.

We learned that upon his release he married the woman, who had waited patiently until he was free, and that together they started life anew in South America.

**EPISODE IX**  
**THE SNIP OF SILK**



## THE SNIP OF SILK

It was long past the luncheon hour, and I was taking the steps from the laboratories to the street three at a time, when the voice of my old friend, Inspector Rousseau, hailed me.

"Don't go away yet. I've something here that will interest you," and he tapped a small paper parcel under his arm with an air of mystery.

"Monsieur Benita, the *commissaire* of the Neuilly station, brought it, and Bertillon has decided to lunch upstairs in order to make an immediate investigation. He sent me to look for you."

I hesitated a moment, for I had been hard at work since dawn, and felt hungry.

"That's all right," Rousseau said when I mentioned the fact. "I heard the chief order the meal, so I know he expects us to eat with him."

There was no help for it, and I turned back with my colleague.

"Let's have a look at the thing," Bertillon exclaimed, holding out his hand for the package. "Benita said it was something quite unusual." Slipping off the string and paper, he disclosed a small tin. We all gave an exclamation of amazed disgust when the lid was removed, for inside, on a bed of bloodstained sawdust, lay a newly severed human ear. Bertillon stared thoughtfully at the grisly morsel a moment, then, reaching for his tweezers, lifted and placed it on a sheet of waxed paper.

"H'm—not very nice, is it? A man's ear evidently, cut off with a small, blunt knife; a shred of the cheek and some hair have even been torn away with it."

He drew a pencil and pad towards him. "A well-shaped ear—lobe, concha, and helix are regular and clearly defined.

"Where was this horrible thing found!" I asked, unable to repress a shiver of aversion, for Bertillon's last words had conjured up a monstrous vision of bestial cruelty and hatred.

"A taxi-driver brought the parcel to the police station this morning. It was left in his car some time during the night. He believes a woman, closely wrapped in furs and wearing a veil, who hailed him at the Madeleine and was driven to the Avenue Parmentier left it behind. The man gave one or two details, but they are vague. He stated that this woman, who spoke with a foreign accent, used a very strong perfume which reminded him of roses. He found this cigarette-stump on the mat," and Bertillon pointed to a short, amber-coloured cigarette. "It has a fleck of lipstick, is also perfumed, and undoubtedly contains fine Turkish tobacco of a kind not sold in France. He also noticed that when the woman alighted she bent down and looked at his number-plate, scribbling the while in a notebook. I believe therefore that the package was left behind intentionally. The papers have naturally got hold of the story and will come out with flaming headlines to-night. Thus the purpose of the unknown criminal, whether revenge or intimidation, will be achieved without the risk of communicating directly with the people involved in this plot.

"Let us now examine the wrapper. Plain grey paper,

watermark 'Lyon'. There is actually an address : '*Youssouff, 7 Rue d'Espagne à la Villette, Paris, France*'. It has been clumsily printed in red ink—no, by Jove, it's blood ! A pointed stick has been used instead of a pen. Spanish stamps, and the postmark—Cadiz. It would seem, then, that this Youssouff, for whom the package was intended, guessed at the contents without opening it, and got rid of the thing in such fashion that others will read of the discovery in the Press. Monsieur Benita declares he found the seals intact. Queer seals they are, too ; I should say an ancient Spanish doubloon has been used. Perhaps one of those coins people carry on watch-chains. You'd better go along to this address at once, Rousseau, before the evening papers come out."

"Quite useless, sir," my colleague replied. "I know La Villette from end to end ; there *is* no Rue d'Espagne."

"So. Well, I'm not surprised. Another queer thing is that one would expect the ear to be in an advanced state of putrefaction after travelling from Cadiz to Paris, since it has obviously not been treated with antiseptics in any way ; instead of which it is quite untainted. A strange case, whichever way you look at it. How is it the postal authorities did not notice the name and address had been written in blood, and how comes the package to have been delivered at all if the address is fictitious ? I shall communicate with Spain at once. We may be able to co-operate, but, since the crime has been committed abroad, it is outside our sphere of action. Take these things to the laboratory and let me have a detailed report to-morrow which I can forward. Wait, there is the signal lamp. Probably the luncheon I ordered. Sorry, I'd quite forgotten !"

But, instead of the waiter from the Sâreté kitchens, a pleasant, buxom woman of about fifty came stumbling into the office. Her pale face and dishevelled appearance were eloquent of tragedy. At sight of this visitor Bertillon sprang to his feet with an exclamation of surprise and dismay.

"My dear Madame Marthe, what has happened to you ? Sit down, sit down. A glass of sherry, Rousseau. This is



Madame Vatel, my landlady in the days when I came to Paris with a slender purse and boundless ambition."

I perceived that Bertillon was greatly moved. Whilst speaking he had pulled a comfortable chair forward, and when the woman had seated herself he held the wine to her trembling lips with unusual solicitude.

"That's better ; the colour is coming back to your cheeks. Compose yourself, my dear friend, and rely on me to help you in every way. Now then, what is it all about ?"

"Thank you, Monsieur Bertillon," Mme. Vatel began ; "I'm sorry to have startled you. I have been so worried lately ; the queer things that have happened since the last month have nearly driven me frantic. Finally, in sheer despair, I made up my mind to come to you for advice. I——" Suddenly her eyes dilated terribly ; twice she tried ineffectually to speak ; then, with quivering lips and distorted face, she pointed a shaking finger at the ear on the table, which we had quite forgotten, and fell forward in a swoon.

For a moment we lost our heads. Bertillon lifted the poor woman and carried her to a couch, whilst Rousseau dashed away for the matron. It was half an hour before our ministrations had the desired effect and Mme. Vatel opened her eyes. Meanwhile the cause of her collapse had been removed, and Bertillon seated himself beside the couch and with soothing words brought back some measure of calm.

"He is dead ; I know it, the poor man ! I recognized the mole on his cheek ! Oh, Monsieur Bertillon, how did it happen ?"

"You are quite mistaken, my dear, good woman. That—that thing you saw was sent to us from abroad. Your nerves are overwrought."

"No, no—I am sure it is Monsieur Castiglioni's ear. That terrible woman had something to do with it. She had only one ear."

My chief looked helplessly at me. We were all burning to learn what these cryptic words signified, but we did not feel justified in upsetting her again.

"Try to tell us all about it if you can. But begin at the beginning. Remember, we are all in the dark as yet."

"Yes, yes—I will. I'll try to be brave. *Voilà*: you know, monsieur, that when my dear husband died he left me that nice house at Becon-les-Bruyères. I thought the best thing to do was to divide it into *appartements* and fit up a big kitchen for my tenants' meals. It was a good idea, and I got along very well. 'Le Repos' was the name I gave my house, and it was always quiet and restful. Lately, as you know, business has been bad for everyone, and when, about a month ago, a charming foreign gentleman was sent to me by Captain Briggs, my husband's old friend, I was very glad. The newcomer chose the little suite on the third floor. Such a nice man, although his sight was defective. 'I shall stay at least three months,' he told me, 'on condition that I am never disturbed. My nerves are very shaky, so you must put up with my little peculiarities, but I'll pay you well. I want to have a small wicket fitted in my door, Madame Vatel, just to be able to peep out and see who comes to visit me before opening. You won't mind that, will you? What do you say to ten louis a month extra for the trouble, eh? And—yes—I must have bars fixed to my windows and a heavy bolt on the door. I was frightened to death once by burglars, and ever since I only sleep if I feel sure I can't be taken by surprise.' I didn't like the idea, and told him so; but, you know how it is—two hundred francs a month extra is a lot of money. Besides, his ways were so gentle. Well, he came, and for a while everything was all right. It did give me a turn at first to see him slide the little wicket back and peer at me every time I brought his repast, especially as he always wore blue glasses. But I got used to it."

"Did you take the food into the room?" Bertillon asked quietly, looking up from his notes.

"No—there is a short, dark passage before you get to his door, and we put a table there on which to serve all his meals. He used to take the table in after I'd gone and push it out again when he'd finished."

"Did he go out much?"

"Always towards dusk ; a closed carriage came for him. Then he'd wrap himself in a thick coat, pull his hat over his eyes, and wait until I rang the bell. That meant, as we'd arranged, that there was no one on the stairs. He'd go down quickly, jump into the carriage, and away they went. After two or three hours, sometimes more, he'd come back. The coachman would ring, or, if it was very late, open the door with the key I put under the mat, and Monsieur Castiglioni would scuttle upstairs, looking neither right nor left."

"Such extraordinary ways must have caused comment among your other boarders? Didn't it strike you this unknown might be hiding from the police?"

"No, because of the letter from Captain Briggs, in which he said I should find Monsieur Castiglioni eccentric, but perfectly honourable. As for my boarders, they were mostly out all day. Well, he'd been there about two weeks, when the first of the unpleasant things I've come about happened. I had gone to bed with a headache, and, being unable to sleep, took a book to read. I suppose I had dropped off, when suddenly, about midnight, I was startled to hear Elise, the new housemaid, screaming, "Madame, madame, the house is on fire! Terrified, as well you may suppose, I rushed out to find the passage full of black smoke. It was like a thick fog, rolling in clouds down the stairs and into the rooms. In a minute you couldn't see your hand before your eyes. It made my lips and throat smart so much that I nearly fainted. Everybody was yelling ; doors were opening all up and down ; two ladies that hadn't been with me very long began to shout and go into hysterics ; and just as I heard the welcome sound of the fire engine there came the bang of a pistol from over my head and a horrible laugh like an animal snarling, and somebody rushed past, nearly knocking me down. At once, as though by magic, the smoke melted, and in a few minutes the air was clear again. It was no fire at all ; some wicked person had set light on the stairs to a roll of cloth steeped in chemicals, and it was this had caused the smoke. Now comes the second incident that upset me so. Seeing that Monsieur Castiglioni's apartment was still shut, I knocked to ask if

he was all right. Instantly the bathroom door behind me opened and a dreadful face looked out. It was so horrible I should never have recognized it, but as I stared, unable to move, the fierce lines smoothed away, the features seemed to melt and alter, and then I saw it was my boarder, without his spectacles for once. He was very apologetic ; the cry of fire had terrified him, he said. Yet I could have sworn that while he was talking he pushed a pistol out of sight. That shows how nervous he was, doesn't it ?

It was not until I was in my room again that I noticed a smudge of blood on my arm where the shadow figure had brushed past me. It was no one belonging to the house, for I made a point at breakfast of looking them over for a wound or bandages."

"Was the front door open before the fire engine came ?" Bertillon asked.

"Yes, the minute she saw the smoke, Elise ran out, just as she was, to the alarm, and she left the door wide open. Now comes the next occurrence. You'll say I'm foolish ; maybe my nerves were shaken by some intangible evil in the air ; but I can't help thinking it has a deeper meaning than would appear. A week ago a lady called, richly dressed in furs, with a thick veil, through which I could just see her eyes, large, black and fierce, and asked to see some rooms I had advertised. Whilst she was talking, my gaze happened to wander to her hair, and I saw that just where the end of the right ear should have been was a red, angry patch. Probably she had met with an accident ; it didn't look as though she'd been born that way. I left her alone in my front sitting-room for a moment whilst I went to fetch my list of prices. I walk rather silently, you know, and as I opened the door again she straightened up with a pair of scissors in her hand, with which she'd snipped a bit of stuff from my curtains. I was speechless with indignation, naturally. The creature tried to laugh it off, and said the silk was so pretty she wanted to get some like it. I showed her out at once of course. The idea, to come——"

"Just a minute, Madame Vatel," Bertillon interposed. "Did it appear to you that she used a strong perfume ?"

"Roses, monsieur, roses ; the whole room smelled of them."

"Ah—and the scissors, were they the common pocket-type or large ones ?"

"Large scissors, such as I use for needlework. She put them into her bag. That same evening—I had been out to post a letter—I caught a man at work at my name-plate ; it is a large enamelled square of metal with the words 'Le Repos' in gold on blue ground. He dropped the screw-driver and ran, when he saw me, but one of the screws had already been removed. All little matters, that mean nothing perhaps when taken one by one, and yet I cannot help thinking they are connected. Just a woman's foolish fancies, I dare say, although some would call it intuition. Somehow I can't rid myself of the thought that these things have to do with the disappearance of Monsieur Castiglioni. It was the next day that he vanished. Went out as usual in his carriage and never came back."

Bertillon nodded gravely. "It sounds bad, but you'll find he'll return sooner or later. These things may have caused him to become ill. As for the smoke-bomb, I imagine it was merely an attempt to rob you."

"But the woman with only one ear, who cut a piece from my curtains, why did she do it ?"

"It does sound queer ; perhaps she was just a crank. Anyway, I'll call and have a look at your house. You have a key to your missing lodger's rooms, I suppose ?"

"No, sir, he insisted on fitting a special lock. You'll have to send for a locksmith."

"Very well—say nothing, my dear Mrs. Vatel, and expect me in an hour's time. One of my men shall drive you home. By the way, who are the most recent of your boarders ?"

"The two ladies, Madame Durand and her daughter Alice. They came a day or two after poor Monsieur Castiglioni. Then there is Monsieur Nieuport, a Dutchman, and Mr. Howard, an Englishman."

"I see. You could, I daresay, arrange for my assistant to stay in your house for a while. Do you serve *table d'hôte* ?"

"Certainly ; we all eat together, except when a tenant insists

on taking his meals in his apartment, or in one of the private dining-rooms."

"Who waits on them?"

"Sometimes Elise, sometimes Charles, my gardener and handyman; just now Charles is away."

"Then I think you'd better arrange to let my assistant take over his duties, it will simplify matters."

When Madame Vatel had gone, Bertillon removed the cloth he had thrown over the ear and stared intently at the ugly thing, so pregnant with the passions and hatreds of mankind, as though by the mere exertion of his will he could penetrate its secret.

"I look upon this as the most puzzling case we've had for many a day," he said at last with a sigh. "If, as poor Mrs. Vatel supposes, it is her tenant's ear, how comes it to have been sent from Cadiz? No, it's not possible. She was overwrought, and imagined the resemblance. Well, come along. If I find nothing definite, you will have to play the waiter for a few days."

'Le Repos' was one of those houses which architects contrive to build in series, and, but for various ornamentations and insignificant details, resembled a dozen others in the street. Bertillon gave me a sharp glance when I pointed this out.

"Our thoughts run in the same channel, I think," he said—"a fiendishly clever scheme if it's that. Here is one that is to let. 'The Poppies'—queer names people give their houses. We'll just have a look."

As usual, it was a pleasure to watch Bertillon at work when hot on a scent. I realized that my chance remark had suggested a theory to his subtle brain, but wisely refrained from confessing that I was unable to follow his reasoning.

Vaulting the low paling, he crept about the untidy garden; climbed the steps and scrutinized the windows; finally, running to the gate, he paused a moment to examine the worm-eaten posts and the agent's boards advertising the house "to be let or sold", and then, with blazing eyes, sprang into the car.

"Drive to the Rue des Marrons as quickly as you can, Rousseau; I want to catch the agent before he leaves."

My colleague needed no second bidding, for he loved speed and excitement, and a short twenty minutes later we drew up before a dirty office plastered with auctioneer's posters and handbills.

"Who has been to visit 'The Poppies' at Becon lately?" my chief asked a frowsy clerk drowsing over a desk.

"A lady paid for a three months' option," the man replied irritably. "I cannot deal with you for the moment."

At sight of Bertillon's card his manner changed, however, and he paled visibly.

"Nothing wrong, I hope, sir? The lady came a couple of weeks ago and I showed her over the place. She seemed delighted, and even measured the windows to see if some lace curtains she possessed could be utilized."

"She did, eh—and you gave her the keys?"

"Naturally, since she paid for an option on the house. She contemplated making certain alterations, she said, if we came to terms, and wished to go there with her architect."

"This lady, she had some very fine furs, did she not?"

"Yes, that is so."

"Did you notice if she used any special perfume?"

"Apparently you know the person—my office smelt like a garden of roses after she had left."

"The thing grows clearer," Bertillon muttered when we were on our way to 'Le Repos' once more. "But there are points I don't understand. The footprints on the path of that empty house showed that several people had passed that way not long ago. That, of course, is nothing. But the windows had been cleaned recently—I could see the marks where they had been wiped, and they were still clean outside; whereas inside they were dirtier than one would expect, but it was artificial dirt. Someone had flung muddy water over them; the downward streaks proved that. Clever, eh? The wire around the 'To Let' boards had also been untwisted not many days ago, and the name-plate on the gate unscrewed, for instead of the rusty screws which had stained the enamel on the plate, I found bright new heads; so it's obvious what happened."



THE MAN WHO PLAYED THE PART OF COACHMAN AND  
DROVE CORTES TO HIS FATE



THE MAID, ERISE, WHO CONCEIVED THE SCHEME OF THE  
DUPLICATE HOUSES





"Obvious to you, sir," I ventured, "but not to us."

"No ; well, use your brains and puzzle it out. I've got to discover how that ear travelled to Spain and back to Paris without——"

"It didn't, if you feel sure it is that of Mme. Vatel's lodger," I interrupted, nettled at his brusqueness. "Even *I* could at a pinch obtain a sheet of paper with foreign stamps and a foreign postmark——"

Bertillon turned on me almost savagely. "Of course—that must be the explanation. Sometimes one can't see the forest for the trees in the way. Rousseau shall drive you back to the laboratory. Make sure if that is how it was done, and come back here at once—I may need you."

In little over an hour I rang the bell at the boarding-house and found my chief in the front room pensively gazing at the curtains.

"The stamps were new," I said as he turned, "but the Cadiz postmark had been faked by means of a badly made rubber stamp, and the date added by hand with brush and printer's ink."

"Confound it," Bertillon muttered angrily. "You see how necessary it is in our profession never to take anything for granted. A postmark is such a commonplace thing I hardly glanced at it. Clever, though. Had it not been for Mme. Vatel's story we should have referred the case to Spain. The net tightens, however ; there is some sort of understanding between Monsieur Nieuport—the Dutchman—and the maid Elise. I caught a glimpse of them in the mirror whispering together. They recognized me, I fancy. I've had a look at the missing boarder's rooms. The marks have been removed from his clothes and linen unfortunately, and Madame Vatel does not remember if his things had the manufacturer's name on them when sent to the laundry. I do not suppose so. The man himself apparently desired to conceal his identity. That makes our work much more difficult. There is nothing by which I can place him. As I see it, this Castiglioni possessed something of great value which his enemies coveted. But it is constantly also a question of revenge, hence the severed ear. He had

contrived a hiding-place under the floor, by the way. I found it, because I suspected something of the sort and tried every single board with my knife. Since the cavity was empty, we may assume he always carried this valuable object, whatever it was, with him whenever he went out, and those who watched him knew it, to his undoing. I am waiting for Louys and the local *commissaire* of police. We'll enter that empty house as soon as it's dark. That is where I feel sure we shall find his body if he has been murdered. Ah, Rousseau is outside; come along. We'll split up and walk, to avoid comment."

Night had come by the time Bertillon had explained matters to the *commissaire*, and with it a drizzling rain that chilled exceedingly. Apparently the officer—it was the same who had sent us the parcel—considered Bertillon to be chasing a phantom, for he grumbled loudly at having to waste his time in such weather on a grotesque expedition. Seen thus, with the water splashing from its many disjointed gutters, the empty house looked merely dismal and commonplace, but to my excited fancy the gust of dank air that rushed out when Rousseau opened the door with one of his skeleton keys was redolent of crime and its attendant horrors.

"Step carefully," Bertillon commanded, flashing the rays of his torch along the dirty floor. "Footsteps, you see—ha, and blood! Does that look as though I'm wasting your time, Monsieur Benita? See, there's a broad smudge where a body was dragged to the stairs. Rats go underground; we'll find what we seek in the cellar."

As we advanced, uncanny creakings and cracklings sounded above and below, rats scuttled to cover at every step, and the accumulated dust of years made us cough and brought tears to our eyes. The paper fluttered in tattered festoons from the mildewed walls, and every yard or so we came across another gout of blood. Keeping well to the side, we descended to the kitchen.

"Look," Bertillon whispered, pointing to a cracked earthenware basin, forgotten by some former tenant, "there's a crimson scum around the edge. That is where the assassin washed his hands before leaving; and there . . ."

A shudder shook me as I followed his gaze : the door of a small recess stood ajar, and on the floor, half buried beneath a mound of quicklime, sprawled the nude body of a man, a slender stiletto in his heart.

"The right ear is missing," Rousseau muttered, "and a pair of broken blue spectacles are sticking out of that devilish stuff. It's Madame Vatel's boarder right enough, although definite identification will not be easy, monsieur. They've burned the face with acid."

When we had taken the requisite measurements and photographs, Bertillon cleansed the distorted features.

"This is an act of revenge without a doubt," he said, "Madame Vatel noticed that the woman who came to steal a snip of her curtains had only one ear. We may discover that the dead man there was responsible for the mutilation. It would account for much which appears to me unnecessarily elaborate if the mystery woman had only wished to rob him. That the woman of the perfume has done this foul thing is certain—and, unless I'm mistaken, the quicklime will forge another link in the chain if she has not destroyed the shoe. I've found the imprint of her heel, and there by the wall the mark of the sole also. We must take a plaster cast of it at once. The gelatine and gypsum are in the car."

Only one more discovery did we make : it was the stub of an amber-tinted cigarette lying in the passage. When our work was finished we gathered around our chief, who had seated himself on a broken packing-case.

"You, Rousseau," he said crisply, "take this snip of silk Mme. Vatel gave me ; to-morrow you must visit all the shops where they keep such stuff. One of them will recall having sold about twenty yards of it in one piece recently. Thereupon you will enquire where it was cut and sewn into curtains, and to whom these were delivered, or who fetched them. When you have that information report to me at once. Naturally these criminals dared not risk having anything sent beforehand to this empty house. They had to act quickly without attracting attention, and would have the silk or the finished curtains delivered at the residence of one of their number, and thus

at last we shall trace them. Our second clue is the horse and carriage the unfortunate man had hired. No doubt he thought an automobile with its number plate could be too easily identified. Well, so can a carriage—more quickly indeed. If we fail to find them by means of the curtains, you must dress as an ostler or stable-lad," he continued, turning to me, "and go to all the mews—there are not many left in Paris. The vehicle was a four-wheeler, Madame Vatel said, and the horse a bay mare, with one white foreleg and a splash of white between the eyes. She has an observing eye, the old lady.

"I trust, Monsieur Benita, that you will prevent the papers from getting wind of this ; otherwise our birds will vanish. Post a man where he can watch this house. If anyone but the agent tries to enter he must be arrested and taken to headquarters. I shall make it my business to keep an eye on Elise and the pseudo-Dutchman."

"How did they persuade that poor fellow to come here, monsieur ?" I ventured to ask, seeing Bertillon was about to go.

"Surely it's clear? These criminals, whoever they are, realized how much the houses in the neighbourhood are outwardly alike. They relied, moreover, on Castiglioni's defective eyesight. They first made an attempt to frighten him into running out with the thing they coveted, by a false alarm of fire, knowing well that a man will naturally try to save what he values most. But this victim was wary, and when one of them attempted to force his way into Castiglioni's rooms in the confusion he shot him. Thereupon they ordered curtains similar to those in Madame Vatel's windows and obtained a duplicate name-plate for the gate, thus transforming this place into an exact replica of 'Le Repos'. They must have bribed the coachman Castiglioni had originally hired to let someone else take his place, or else they paid him well to stop the coach here, and it was Elise, I fancy, who opened the door. It is not to be wondered at that the man was deceived by such an elaborate scheme. Windows, gate, curtains, and the maid at the door—everything looked as usual. Remember, he was in the habit of running up the steps and entering quickly. You heard the landlady tell us that the coachman always rang the bell,

and that Castiglioni would thereupon make a dash for the door, looking neither right nor left. The moment he was inside of course—we can guess what happened. Overpowered and robbed of the thing he carried, his enemies had their way with the poor devil. They cut off his ear and finally stabbed him and buried the body in quicklime. I am curious to know what powerful motive is at the root of all this. Well, we shall find out soon. The more *outré* a crime, the more clues there are."

When, the following evening, I arrived at headquarters to report, I found Bertillon dressed in rough dark clothes, and with him Rousseau and half a dozen of our men.

"Our quest is at an end!" he cried excitedly the moment I appeared. "Thanks to the fingerprints and measurements I sent to Spain, I have learned that Castiglioni was in reality the notorious Spanish Moor Quasiglia Cortes. Formerly an officer in the colonial army, Cortes was accused by a fellow officer named Savary de Veron of having stolen secret documents giving the location of the sunken treasure galleon *Madre de Dios*. He was acquitted of this charge by the Spanish Naval Courts because Savary de Veron, who had made the soundings and corrected the old charts, vanished suddenly before the trial and has never been traced from that day to this. Strange, sinister rumours circulated at the time that Cortes was responsible for the disappearance of Commander de Veron, and, although innocent in the eyes of the law, he was compelled to fly for his life. He thereupon gathered a band of cut-throats and became a redoubtable outlaw. I'll wager that he stole those charts after all, and, if so, I can make a guess now at who it is killed him and regained possession of them. Savary de Veron had a very beautiful wife. She was of Spanish-Moorish blood also, and would never rest until her husband's death had been avenged and his good name cleared.

Being half Oriental, she would naturally be addicted to the use of strong perfumes such as Attar of Roses. Every link in the chain rings true, you see. Rousseau discovered that the woman who called on Madame Vatel, and whose strange personality stamps this case as exceptional, ordered several

curtains to be made and delivered at a house in the Bois. That, then, is where she and her accomplices are hiding, although the place is supposed to be occupied by an elderly invalid. The Sûreté Générale has furthermore informed me that vague reports have come in of a mysterious foreigner who has been trying to find capital to charter a ship equipped with machinery for deep-sea diving. That was our friend Cortes, of course. Are you all ready? Right—then let's be off. Benita and his men are watching the house at the Bois."

The handsome mansion in the Avenue Velasquez to which we drove in closed cars was the last place one would have suspected of sheltering criminals. The windows were heavily barred and in darkness, and the place appeared deserted. As soon as our men had posted themselves at back and front Bertillon signed to Rousseau to open the massive portal. It was not an easy task, but at the end of twenty minutes the lock turned with a vicious spang and the door swung wide. One by one we entered on tiptoe. The silence was ominous, and we feared we had come too late, but hardly had the last man passed the threshold when the spacious hall was abruptly flooded with brilliant light and we gazed on a scene which I, at least, shall never forget. Stretched on a couch at the far end of the room was a gaunt, white-haired man, whose pallid, haggard features contrasted strangely with his burning eyes. Besides him, both arms thrown protectingly over his shoulders, crouched a handsome, swarthy woman with markedly Spanish features, whilst behind these two were grouped Mme. Vatel's maid Elise, a scowling youth with typically Eastern face, and a thickset fellow in coachman's dress.

"As I feared, it is the end!" the man on the couch cried hoarsely, dropping the pistol he held on the carpet. "We shall never punish the others now! Kiss me, Lola! Let us show these men of the law that our love is beyond their reach."

"You are Commander Savary de Veron, I suppose?" Bertillon said, stepping forward. "The man who was ruined by Cortes and his band?"

"I am, but my time on earth is short. This is my plucky wife, and these my servants and friends. They at least played only

a minor part in the plot for meting out just punishment to that dog Cortes. Look"—the man swept back his silvery hair and I perceived a great red scar where his ear should have been. "And this!" he continued, and with the same gesture he disclosed that under the woman's hair was a similar disfigurement. "Captain Cortes was always my rival and enemy, even whilst we both served our country, and when he discovered that I had located the old treasure-ship he determined to possess himself of the charts and soundings, and, despite my vigilance, succeeded in stealing all but the secret code I had used. My wife had rejoined me in Tangiers, and when Cortes learned I had sent a report of the theft to headquarters, accusing him, he caused us to be captured separately by the bandit Youssouff, a devil in human shape. Every method of torture was tried to make me reveal the code, but I stood firm until the day I was shown my wife's ear. Then I gave way. Instead of releasing us, as he had promised, Cortes thereupon left us to rot and die, prisoners in the hands of his gang of cut-throats, of whom Youssouff the Turk was the worst. Fortunately, he laboured in vain to raise the gold from the old treasure-ship. Thanks to Ali here, whom you know as Monsieur Nieuport, we escaped and followed Cortes to Rome, and then to Paris. What happened to him you know. One question, if I may: I thought we had covered our tracks to perfection. How did you find us?"

"I don't know that I ought to tell you—still, it doesn't matter, you are not a criminal exactly. As you know, the old lady caught your wife snipping a piece from her curtains. It was really that led to your undoing. Why did you not let the maid obtain the sample of silk for you?"

"It was foolish, I admit, but my dear Lola acted on the spur of the moment—Elise was rarely free, and I had learned that Cortes was getting ready to leave Paris. So it was the curtains?"

"Yes—although you overdid things altogether. Paris is not Tangiers. That smoke-bomb was a mistake. Ali was responsible for that, I suppose—I see he carries his arm stiffly, evidently Cortes' pistol-shot did not miss. Believe me,



however, you would have been caught in any case. Murder will out. But I congratulate you on the idea of the duplicate houses."

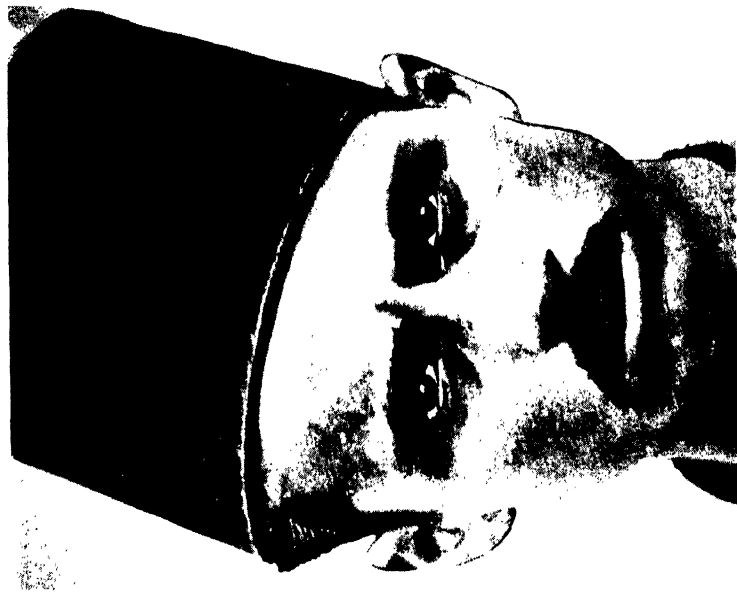
"It was my idea, that!" the girl Elise cried shrilly. "I obtained a post with Madame Vatel, when we were sure, thanks to Captain Briggs, that Cortes would go to her boarding-house. He was cautious, that devil, and for a time we saw no way of getting at him. I did it for my dear mistress, because my poor master is a cripple since Cortes tortured him."

"Be quiet, child," the old Spaniard intervened. "There is no need for you to confess to anything; I alone am guilty."

"I still do not understand why you left that parcel with the ear in the cab," Bertillon said curiously as Rousseau was about to step forward to handcuff our prisoners.

"It seemed to me the only safe method for informing Youssouff and his ruffians that Nemesis was at last on their track and that already their leader had met with his just deserts. Revenge is doubly sweet if those you hate taste in advance the torment of terror. To make quite sure those it concerned would understand, the ear was addressed to Youssouff and sealed with one of the old coins from the treasure-ship. I had learned that the Turk had come to Paris with Cortes, and that he was hiding somewhere at La Villette. I hoped that fear would cause him to make a false move, for he was to be the next one to die. Had you not found us so soon, I should have killed them all, one by one. Now—alas—God in heaven—my darling!" The woman had half risen, still clinging to her husband, her lips pressed to his; before we could move a convulsive shiver twisted her frame and she collapsed across the man's knees, dragging him from the couch. In a moment Ali had knocked up the light switch and leapt for the window, but the abrupt movement dispelled the paralysing shock of the unexpected tragedy, and a minute later the handcuffs snapped shut, locking the girl and the two servants together.

"Dead!" Bertillon exclaimed hoarsely, dropping the limp hand of the unfortunate Spaniard. "His wife died whilst he



ALI, WHO SEVERED THE EAR AND KILLED CORTES



THE SEVERED EAR AS IT LAY IN THE SAWDUST IN THE  
TIN



was yet speaking. They must have taken poison when they heard us at the door."

The Chief of the Sûreté decided that, although the murder of Cortes had been committed on French soil, it was for Spain to try the three accomplices, since the beginning of the drama was better known in their own land. They were sent to Madrid under escort, and we learned a year later that they had been acquitted because the jury considered Cortes to have been a traitor to Spain, and an outlaw besides, with a price on his head.

"It was Ali, it seems," Bertillon remarked, when I came to classify the dossiers, "who severed the ear and then killed Cortes. There is no doubt the Spaniard's wife was present, however, and ordered him to do it. I compared one of the shoes with our plaster mould. It is true she and her husband had undergone fearful torture at his hands, but it's horrible to think a woman can be so savage. The French coachman whom Cortes had actually hired to drive him when he first came to live with Madame Vatel has been found at last. It was the Spaniard's servant took his place, of course, afterwards. The fellow admits he was paid a large sum by an elegantly dressed woman, who said she was Madame Cortes, to allow her own man to drive the coach for a time whilst he remained quietly at home. She told him she was jealous and wanted to set a watch on her husband. That detail had puzzled me. Cortes was keenly alert and on his guard, and the substitution had to be cleverly planned. Unfortunately for him, the glasses he wore as a disguise made his eyes almost useless because he was not really short-sighted.

"A pity his enemies made such trivial and yet such important mistakes. The idea of the duplicate houses was ingenious. The girl Elise has brains, and, since none of them was a criminal as we understand it, I should have preferred to be beaten for once.

"Put the cigarette-ends and the wrapper with the forged postmark in our museum. Add a piece of silk from Mme. Vatel's curtains also—that was really our principal clue."



**EPISODE X**  
**THE MYSTERY OF ORLY HIGHWAY**



## THE MYSTERY OF ORLY HIGHWAY

WHEN I entered Bertillon's office with my usual daily report I found him animatedly discussing our latest problem, the crime of a jealous doctor, with a little saturnine man of forty or thereabouts, whom I recognized at once to be Dr. Faubert, famous for his extraordinary theories on the heredity of criminal tendencies. He turned his head at my approach and I gazed into the queerest eyes I had ever seen. Shifty eyes were no novelty, but those of Dr. Faubert were instead terrifying in their hypnotic fixety. This effect was heightened because one eye appeared large and expressionless, whilst the other was not only much lighter in colour, but small and intensely bright. It possessed, moreover, the strange gift of evading my own stare without moving, by a queer shifting of the dancing lights in its depths, so that I unconsciously focused on the friendly and apparently sightless eye. An unpleasant feeling of fear, fleeting and intangible, gripped me a second, to be as swiftly dispelled by the amiable smile and full, sonorous voice with which this extraordinary man greeted me.

"You know Dr. Faubert of course," Bertillon remarked with a tight-lipped smile. "He has brought me some Assyrian pottery to examine because he thinks it is faked, and, naturally, we fell to discussing crime!"

"When Greek meets Greek——" I replied bowing. "The doctor is an authority on crime in the abstract."

"Exactly," the little man chuckled, rising, "in the abstract only, whilst Monsieur Bertillon deals with crime as a definite, tangible menace to the community," and with a sweeping salutation he withdrew.

"An unusually subtle fellow that," Bertillon said thoughtfully. "I cannot quite read him. These things are very clumsily



faked and I do not believe he was really taken in by them. Why, then, did he take the trouble to submit them to me !”

“Perhaps he is just an enthusiast. Crime seems to attract people more and more. The thirst for excitement, no doubt, because life is becoming humdrum.”

Although Bertillon’s pencil hovered over the sheet of paper before him, I saw that he was just aimlessly drawing squares and circles, his thoughts far away.

“The papers have commented on the fact that I’ve decided to publish a pamphlet for the use of investigators, in which all crimes will be classified,” he said at last, as though thinking aloud : “the crude, stupidly planned crimes, committed with firearm, knife, or poison, which are practically always detected, and also the more subtle schemes. Dr. Faubert seemed interested in the idea ; he asked me, in fact, which type of crime I considered detection-proof.”

“The answer is obvious,” I remarked. “If I were to plan a murder I would try to make it appear to be death from natural causes, or at least an accident. I should never sleep whilst I knew you were investigating ; I should therefore try, above all things, to avoid arousing your suspicions. The only safe crime is one that does not look like a crime,” and I laughed at the notion of having Bertillon on my track.

My chief stiffened and frowned. “H’m—well, I am glad you are no criminal. That is indeed the only absolutely safe method, and God knows how many assassins are walking the streets as free men *because* we were never called to investigate. The motor-car, for instance, lends itself admirably to faked accidents, and the country police are inexperienced.”

“No doubt about that,” I replied. “Take the road between Versailles and Rambouillet as an example. It is not overcrowded, yet it appears to be an exceedingly dangerous highway. Eight fatal accidents have taken place in the vicinity of Orly since May—in three months. I wonder how many were caused intentionally ? Although, since the driver was also killed or badly injured in each instance, he could only have benefited indirectly.”

“So it would seem, but criminals are becoming more cunning

and callous as science forges new weapons for them. At all events, I intend to investigate one or two of these apparent accidents, and I have requested Captain Delvoye of the Versailles gendarmerie to give me a detailed report of any that may occur in his section. Since that comprises St. Jacques, Orly, and Rambouillet, I do not think we shall wait long."

"But does not the mere fact that so many accidents have occurred on the same road make it probable they are really due to some natural and local cause? Surely criminals would not all choose the same highway?" I asked.

Before Bertillon could reply the telephone rang, and as he listened I was surprised at the grim expression that crept to his face.

"A queer coincidence," he said, hooking up the receiver. "That was Captain Delvoye. Marcel Jeannot, the sportsman, has been killed. His racing-car was found just after dawn, a complete wreck, not far from Orly, at the long curve we have just been discussing. With him were those two American oil magnates who have been attracting so much attention by their reckless expenditure. They are dead also. So far as Delvoye has ascertained, the accident was caused by the slippery state of the road. The driver apparently jammed his brakes on so furiously that the abrupt check sent the car flying off the road in a four-wheel skid. It rolled down a bank and dropped ten feet. Well, this time I'm going to have a look at the place myself. I knew Marcel's father; we were at school together." Suddenly he stopped speaking, a dawning horror in his eyes.

"Good heavens, I've just remembered—Marcel was to have married that pretty actress Lisa Lefevre next week! What an end to a charming romance!"

As though to emphasize his exclamation, the light on his desk glowed brightly, warning us that a visitor was to be expected, and five minutes later the door opened and Mlle. Lefevre, whom I had often seen on the stage, came bursting excitedly into the room. Her face was deadly pale, and her beautiful hazel eyes brimmed with unshed tears.

"My fiancé has been murdered, Monsieur Bertillon," she

cried fiercely, "and I've come to ask you to hunt down the criminal."

"What makes you think he has been the victim of foul play?" my chief asked, a cold glitter in his eyes.

"This letter, monsieur, from a girl who has been persecuting poor Marcel for more than a year. She threatened to kill him if he married me. Once before he had a similar letter in which she even warned him he would die whilst driving," and she flung two folded letters on the table. Bertillon read them slowly with intent expression.

"These are just silly threats such as a jealous woman makes, mademoiselle; they mean nothing. She mentions that a crystal-gazer foretold his death—that is not a threat. H'm wait a moment, though: this girl Giselle, is she not the er—friend—of Dr. Faubert—a Spanish creole!"

"Yes—how do you know?"

Bertillon feigned not to notice the question. "That is the only point of any importance so far as I can see. Well, mademoiselle, I had already decided to investigate this accident. so you may rest assured that if there has been foul play I shall inform you at once. If you care to return, do so, but please say nothing to anyone."

An hour later we were speeding over the broad road to Orly by way of the Chevreuse Valley. A knot of people had collected near the wrecked car, held in check by gendarmes, and we alighted some distance away to avoid comment. Dupont, our motor expert, at once examined the wreckage, whilst my chief scrutinized the road and the bank down which it had rolled. The report Dupont made after lengthy tests coincided with what we had heard from Captain Delvoye, who had joined us soon after our arrival.

"Obviously the driver's fault," he said. "The road slopes the wrong way here and becomes narrow at the curve. Poor Jeannot probably felt the car skidding and slammed on his brakes."

"When did it happen?" Bertillon asked.

"About one in the morning. He and his American friends were returning from a party at Prince Damiello's place near

Rambouillet, and I daresay they were—let us say—jolly. A farmer taking his produce to Paris for the early market heard screams, then a roar of smashing machinery, and a moment later he saw a great pillar of flame. When he realized he could not approach because of the heat, he drove madly to the Orly police station and informed the officer in charge. He had met no one and seen no other vehicle on the road. The only queer part is that, although badly bruised, the unfortunate men, who were flung clear of the fire, have none of them any visible injury likely to cause death. The doctor who examined them believes they died of concussion and violent shock."

Bertillon pursed his lips to whistle, but instantly checked the impulse. Without a word he began to circle round the wreck which lay, its four wheels in the air, like some dead, uncouth monster. Then he beckoned me to him and walked slowly and thoughtfully up the road, peering right and left.

"That white hoarding in the fields just at the curve"—he exclaimed abruptly, turning to Captain Delvoye, who had followed us—"it looks new. What is its purpose? Who put it up?"

"The owner of that farmhouse over there, a fellow named Bader. He was so horrified at the many accidents that he erected it to make the curve visible from a distance."

"Yes, headlights would pick it out, of course—a kindly thought," and without further ado Bertillon leapt the ditch, crept through a gap in the low hedge, and a moment later I saw him examining the hoarding—a fairly large expanse of rough, white-painted boards. There was a queer intent look in his eyes when at last he came briskly towards us, but he made no remark beyond enquiring whether the scattered houses of the district were connected up with the electric light supply at Orly, to which the gendarme officer replied in the negative. Then with a wave of his hand he climbed into our car and ordered the driver to return at once to headquarters.

Mlle. Lefevre was pacing impatiently up and down outside Bertillon's office, and the moment she caught sight of us she ran eagerly forward. Bertillon answered her unspoken question with a shake of the head.

"I am convinced you are quite wrong, mademoiselle. It was an accident, nothing more."

"It was not, monsieur!" she cried angrily. "I was afraid you would come to that conclusion, so I've arranged to try what a woman's wits can do," and, pushing her way past him into the room, she faced us with flushed cheeks.

"I'd like you to know what I'm going to do, in case anything goes wrong. I've made some enquiries also: the people who have recently met with disaster on the Orly road were nearly all friends of Damiello and his cronies. Marcel and those Americans had also spent the evening at the mysterious Prince's country seat. Does not that strike you as extraordinary?"

"No, mademoiselle. On the contrary it explains the accidents. They dined too well—champagne and cocktails; and night driving on that road requires a clear brain."

"Very well. I shall have a clear brain. I intend to obtain an invitation to one of Damiello's parties for myself and some rich friends, noted for their jewels. I too shall return over the same stretch of road in the dark."

"You believe the prince to be a murderer?—that he robbed those dead motorists?" Bertillon asked, startled.

"It sounds monstrous, doesn't it? Perhaps I am wrong. Anyway, I intend to explore that sinister road after an evening at Prince Damiello's country mansion. I'll give you a detailed report," and with a defiant toss of her curls the girl marched out.

My chief sat for some minutes drumming his fingers on the table, a far-away expression in his eyes. Suddenly he straightened up and said irrelevantly, "What's the name of the farmer who put up the hoarding? Karl Bader—sounds like a foreigner. Run up to Rousseau's department and find out what is known about the man."

The order surprised me, but I knew better than to question Bertillon while he was uncertain of his ground. Rousseau quickly found the dossier I needed. It contained little beyond the information that the farmer, who was believed to be a German-American, had bought the place a year previously with the averred intention of importing Yankee methods.

"American farming would explain the electric power plant I noticed," Bertillon remarked cryptically; then, taking pity on my ill-restrained curiosity, he added:

"Well, as a matter of fact I was considerably surprised to find big insulated terminals attached to the back of the white hoarding. They may mean nothing beyond mechanical ploughs and tractors, of course, but the field, as you saw yourself, has not been ploughed. Nor did the farm look prosperous. It's a queer business. I had to tell the girl I was convinced that her fiancé's death was obviously an accident, for above all we must avoid alarming the criminals, if criminals there be. Her sharp wits had also detected the coincidence that many of the unfortunates who met their deaths on that stretch of highway were returning from merry parties at the Prince's house. That again may be just a freak of chance. So far we are groping in the dark. There is one more point, by the way. The curve slopes the wrong way, yet when built by Thompsons three years ago it banked correctly. That may be the explanation. A long curve with the wrong slope will send a car slithering at the least mistake. However, we want facts, not theories, so I think you and Rousseau had better become loafers for a day or two and prowl about Bader's farm, and I'll have Inspector Louys keep a watch on the Damiello crowd."

To play the tramp was a rôle that suited Rousseau well. We had both a working knowledge of the argot used by the brethren of the open road, and to our amusement found chalked on the gate-post facing the front of the extensive farm buildings the warning symbol that signified "Ware dogs!" It was a queer household that gradually disclosed itself to our prying eyes. Karl Bader might be entered in our records as a German, but he could not disguise the characteristic droop of the eyelids I knew so well. Somewhere on his family tree was a Chinese branch. His wife, whom we encountered on the second day, was as strange as the man. Our meeting was not an event I care to think about. But it crystallized my growing suspicion that there was something sinister about the farm which made it necessary to prevent strangers approaching unseen. We had camped on the bank of a small stream, and Rousseau was

watching the workers in the fields through his Zeiss binoculars, when there came a shrill whistling cry followed by a crashing of the undergrowth and a sound like the panting of running beasts. Rousseau gave one look, turned horribly pale under his artificial grime, and made a bolt for a nearby tree.

"Bears *mon, vieux* !" he cried over his shoulder. "Up with you !"

"Bears be hanged," I retorted, for I had caught sight of the creatures as they ran ; "those are Siberian wolfhounds, and twice as deadly. We'd better cross the stream ; there's someone with them fortunately," and I hastily plunged into the water and scrambled up the opposite shore. A moment later four shaggy dogs that really looked like bears were leaping with horrible snarls against Rousseau's tree and trying with deadly intent to reach his dangling legs. I felt my skin creep with terror. If it came to a fight those fierce dogs would quickly tear our throats out. Finding it impossible to get at my friend, they had turned with weird howls and were preparing to cross the river after me, when to my relief a figure in corduroy riding-costume, with broad-brimmed hat and top boots, burst in turn through the bushes. The high-pitched musical call revealed the woman, and at her sharp command the huge beasts cowered and slunk away.

The high cheekbones and thick-lipped mouth would have been repulsive but for the beautiful glossy hair which was coiled in two thick braids about the woman's head. The type was familiar to me, albeit strangely out of place in a French meadow. A half-breed, Sioux or Chippawa, I thought, and I wondered what could have brought her there. She wasted no time in futile questions ; pointing to the dogs, she gave us clearly to understand that unless we ran for it she would order them to attack us. Her appearance gave me an idea, however. Raising my right hand, I uttered the Redskin's guttural greeting, and, without giving the creature time to recover from her surprise, explained that I had once been a rider in Arizona, years ago, but had to flee from the police, and was now homeless and seeking work.

"Very good, come ! Plenty work at farm," and, risking

the dogs, Rousseau and I limped after her towards the house. A meal was set before us in a spacious whitewashed shed, and after a short parley the husband agreed to let us work in the fields. Thus we were able to come and go unchallenged for several days, so long as we made no attempt to approach the house itself, where someone was always on guard.

"Did the fellow give no reason for this secrecy?" Bertillon asked when I made my report.

"He said he'd been robbed more than once, and was taking no chances. Of course he took us to be just a couple of stupid loafers whom any tale would deceive. There is certainly a dynamo and other machinery there. I could hear the characteristic drone every day. Bader pretends to be experimenting on electrically forced agriculture. That may be true, but, if so, the results are woefully poor. It is only a feeling, but it seemed to me that the farming is a blind. Those people are busy on some criminal enterprise. I do not suppose it has anything to do with the accidents on the road, but I believe we have by chance stumbled on something else. The third day I managed to climb a tree overlooking the upper floor. I had binoculars strapped to my waist, and, thanks to these, I could make out five people sitting at a table. They were bending over some papers in earnest conclave. Bader, his squaw wife, a handsome dark-skinned woman I've not seen before, and—you'd never guess—Dr. Faubert!"

Bertillon's face hardened and became expressionless.

"You are wrong. I fully expected that. He has been seen driving to Orly. Apparently he is also interested in—electrically forced agriculture," and my chief laughed harshly. "Yet for the present we can do nothing but watch and wait. A mysterious household is not necessarily a criminal one. We cannot prove a connection between those people and the automobile accidents. A judge would laugh at us. Did you have another look at that hoarding?"

"Yes—it's as queer as the rest: two circular holes have been cut about four feet apart and as much from the ground. Behind these are several brass rods and a complicated arrangement of



ropes and pulleys and, as you saw yourself, big insulated terminals. Yet, search as I would, I found no wires."

Bertillon nodded gloomily. "We'd better leave them alone for a time. The gendarmes have orders to watch Bader. A search would be useless and put the fellow on his guard."

So for several days I returned to my usual duties at the laboratories, dismissing the matter temporarily from my mind, but irritated at not having succeeded in solving the mystery. Already other investigations had begun to absorb me, when early one morning, whilst leisurely dressing, I was startled to hear Rousseau's gruff tones at the door, and a moment later he burst unceremoniously into the room.

"Hurry, *mon vieux*. The chief is downstairs. We are off to Dr. Déroulède's hospital. Miss Lefevre has been badly hurt."

"What?" I shouted, seizing my coat and hat. "Hurt? How?"

"Smashed up in her car on the Orly road some time last night. Bertillon has already examined the spot where it happened. The girl kept her word and went for a drive there in her big touring-car. I know nothing more."

Bertillon remained obstinately silent during the drive to the hospital, but his manner was nervous and irritable.

We found the pretty actress in a ward by herself swathed in bandages and attended by a quiet, efficient nurse. Despite the evident pain it gave her, she waved to Bertillon the moment his spare form appeared in the doorway.

"I have solved the mystery of the Orly highway," she exclaimed in a weak, shaking voice. Bertillon raised his brows and glanced at the nurse, who apparently understood, for she at once withdrew.

"Now, mademoiselle, please start at the beginning—since you risked your life, let it be to some purpose."

The girl waited until we had seated ourselves by the bed, then, unable to contain herself any longer, began eagerly :

"I did Prince Damiello a great injustice when I suggested he is in some way behind these terrible accidents. It's a ghost, monsieur—a ghost that haunts the road and sends motorists

to their death. I succeeded in getting an invitation to one of Damiello's parties. I did think at the time that my jewels and those of my two South American friends tipped the scale—but I know now I was wrong. Because of that suspicion, after taking these friends as far as Versailles I gave them all my trinkets and put them down in a dark street, making up two excellent dummies with cushions and rugs in the car in case anyone saw me pass. I didn't feel justified in risking their lives. Thank heaven for that! Well, the party was to be one of those all-night affairs for which Damiello is famous, and I drove about the Meudon woods a bit until it was past ten.

"I don't suppose you'll believe my story of what happened after that, and yet it's true. I started off at last, driving fast, but with my eyes and ears open, as you can imagine. There was no moon last night, and unfortunately my lights were not good, but I could see the road fairly well, and I didn't worry. I had left the Chevreuse Valley behind and entered on the broad highway out of Orly, when, as I approached the curve, I heard the drone of a powerful engine somewhere in front. Then almost at once the lamps of a car suddenly appeared before me, on the wrong side of the road, and—the memory makes me feel faint even now—I caught sight of a huge car hurtling towards me at terrific speed, as though intent on smashing me up. It was dreadful—horrible; I saw the car distinctly despite its lamps, which were very low down. The drone of the engine increased to a deafening roar, and a great hunched shape showed clearly at the wheel; it had a white, inhuman, featureless sort of face—I can't describe it better.

"Even then, subconsciously, I suppose, I realized that to put on the brakes or to swerve would be instant death, and I determined to take the shock full on; but I was afraid the steering-wheel would crush me, and I slipped my body sideways, still holding on to it, of course. All this takes a long time to tell. In reality it was a matter of three or four seconds. There was that fearsome car coming straight at me—and then everything became blurred and indistinct, and as I braced myself for the crash the awful thing dissolved like a dream! I went right through that car as though it were just smoke.

I know I screamed with terror ! There was a bumping slide, a nasty pain in my shoulder—and the next thing I remember the doctor was bending over me and injecting something into my arm. That's the whole story, Monsieur Bertillon. I understand now why poor Marcel, who was such a fine driver, put his brakes hard down and skidded. He saw the ghost car also. I suppose you think I'm mad ?”

“I'll not venture an opinion yet, mademoiselle ! You are still shaken and in pain. Stay quietly in bed, and I'll promise to examine the problem and let you know the result.”

Despite the girl's wry face, Bertillon rang the bell for the attendant and made his way to Dr. Déroulède's office.

“It was the Versailles ambulance brought Miss Lefevre, by Captain Delvoye's orders,” the surgeon said in reply to my chief's question. “She has many bruises and is suffering from severe shock, poor thing.”

“Is her mind clear, do you think ?”

“Certainly, certainly ; beyond an inevitable rise in temperature, she is normal.”

Several times during the journey to headquarters Bertillon muttered angrily, “The most devilish thing in all my experience unless the girl imagined it all. Yet she is not the highly-strung, hysterical kind. Is it possible that we are all wrong and that some natural phenomenon of lights and shadows produces a delusion at that curve and nowhere else ! She was driving with open exhaust and the drone of the engine she heard might have been an echo. Funny thing, though, about the headlights. I don't see how one of those queer hallucinations driving at night often produces could also cause her to see strong headlights.”

“It is queer, too,” I concurred, “that she saw the car despite the lights. Generally one sees nothing behind oncoming lamps. Did you notice, monsieur, that she described them as very low down ?”

My words obviously startled Bertillon, but he made no answer. The remainder of the day he spent in rummaging among old dossiers and consulting with our various experts. Then for two consecutive days Bertillon vanished, and when I was finally summoned to his office I found him unusually grim.

"I have sent a notice to the principal papers," he began without preamble, "giving it as my opinion, after careful consideration, that Mademoiselle Lefevre's motoring accident was undoubtedly caused by the state of the road, and that it is just a coincidence so many accidents have occurred near the same spot. Officially the Sûreté has dropped the enquiry, but I have suggested that the slope of the fatal curve should be rectified as soon as possible. I thought I'd better let you know."

"You have definite proof, then, that those accidents are the results of criminal intervention?" I asked, knowing well that this publicity was intended to mislead the malefactors.

"Definite proof, which would convince a magistrate—no," he replied gloomily, "but *I* know it is so, although how it is done still puzzles me."

"And the ghost car?" I queried eagerly.

My chief remained lost in thought a moment, then, rousing himself, said haltingly, "That is what we must find out. It was the girl's remark about the headlights gave me a tangible clue—that and your description of the farmer and his wife. Karl Bader is Wo Sung Fee, an American Chinese. He and the Indian woman were implicated years ago in a series of gruesome crimes in 'Frisco, but escaped for lack of evidence. I've been prowling about the Orly district myself. Those two holes in the white hoarding, with the complex machinery of rods and pulleys, are part of the illusion of an oncoming car, which is produced in some fashion by lamps, connected with the terminals, which run along the rods. As you remarked, one would probably see nothing behind these lamps, but a driver would from force of habit fill in the blank with a purely subjective picture of a car rushing towards him, the more so since the lights moved forward. Nearly always, therefore, he would swerve and put on the brakes. I am convinced also that Sung Fee and his accomplices secretly altered the slope of the curve, making doubly sure."

"But why don't they simply throw a log or some such obstruction across the road. It would be a more certain and much simpler method."

"Simpler, but infinitely more dangerous. A crash caused by a solid obstruction leaves definite traces. Moreover, if the occupants of the car were not killed they would know that they had smashed into a log or some such thing ; an intangible illusion cannot be traced, since nine times out of ten, people would suppose the story of a ghost-car such as Mademoiselle Lefevre imagined she saw, to be the result of shock. These scoundrels are infernally clever. I do not see even now how we can obtain evidence fit for a judge, unless, as usual, they become over confident and continue their fiendish tricks."

"Hence the newspapers reports ?" I suggested.

"Of course. We may take it that some time will elapse before they try again. Dr. Faubert conceived the scheme. He is a madman—a sadistic homicidal maniac. With him are this Chinaman and his Redskin wife and the creole woman who wrote those letters to poor Marcel Jeannot. She is Madame Faubert really ; beneath his cold demeanour the husband is a seething furnace of jealousy, and poor Marcel Jeannot openly made love to the creole. I fancy that when he had made sure Jeannot had been killed, Dr. Faubert called on me in order to discover whether our suspicions had been aroused. Robbery is merely the ostensible motive for these crimes, or, shall I say, by allowing his men to rob the victims he is able to control them.

"Faubert himself cares nothing for money or jewels. The desire to kill or maim, and some even more ghastly monomania, which I have not fathomed, rules him. Your talent for disguise will help us here. You must become the decoy. I don't like the method, but we have no choice. This bogus Albanian prince is their accomplice. I have discovered that he bought his country house at Rambouillet soon after Wo Sung, alias Bader, began his activities at the farm. Draw on the Sûreté's funds. I suggest you become a rich South American for a time ; that will make a show of diamonds and other precious stones seem natural. Durand will supply you with paste gems, and you can take some bundles of Marovitch's excellent counterfeit notes to fill your wallet—be careful not to spend them by mistake.

"Rousseau will drive you in the Mercedes, which is new and makes a show. If my theory is right, you will probably receive an invitation to one of Prince Damiello's parties at Rambouillet. Such an invitation has been the equivalent to sentence of death for many. This time let us hope we shall catch the scoundrels red-handed. If the scheme fails we must try something else."

So for a time I laid aside my duties and sought the nauseous pleasures of Montmartre and Montparnasse, attended the races, and showed myself, flashily dressed, at several fashionable events. The ease with which a fictitious personality can be created at trifling cost startled me. A few letters of introduction, a handsome car, and a few noisy dinners sufficed. The time passed wearily enough, but I perceived I was attracting attention, and noted the burning glances of the dashing woman who styled herself Giselle de Launay, but whom we knew to be in reality Mme. Faubert. Ever in her wake, an unobtrusive silent worshipper, was her husband, and more than once I saw his queer hypnotic gaze fixed on me when dashing Giselle acknowledged my greeting with dazzling smiles. At last, when I had already begun to fear our scheme had failed, an introduction to this prince of doubtful origin was brought about by Giselle herself, and the desired invitation followed as a matter of course. There was to be a large party, I was informed, and the usual reckless gambling.

"Better come Friday evening," the prince lisped pleasantly. "The Russian dancers from the Folies-Bergères have promised to join us after the performance. If you'll meet me at Larue's we'll drive out together. My car will be crowded, so I may have to put one or two of the artistes in yours. Should I not arrive by midnight, don't wait; it is quite possible that I shall have to pick up some of our friends. If you don't see me, take the Orly road from Versailles."

Bertillon listened to my report with frowning face. "They make it so very obvious that I'm almost afraid they've seen through our plan and are laughing at us. However, we must risk that. I'll be ready with Captain Delvoye and his men to raid the farm. Rousseau knows what to do. When he sees

the 'wrecking lights' he'll run right over the bank and let the car smash. He's fixed the accelerator on the old Delage so that she'll gather speed the moment you've jumped clear. You must then contrive to get to the wreckage before they do and lie down as though badly hurt and unconscious. It's the only way to obtain the evidence we need. These creatures are so cunning and elusive, I fear that even if we are successful in catching them trying to rob you, no *juge d'instruction* will believe our story."

I did not trouble to go to the Folies-Bergères, knowing well it was intended I should drive out by myself, and shortly after midnight we bumped over the cobbled streets of sleepy Versailles and entered on the long, curving highway to Orly. I confess my heart began to beat quickly as we neared the sinister farm. Rousseau kept the car flying along at a good speed in case spies were watching, although neither of us knew quite what to expect. I had leant out, searching in vain for the mysterious hoarding, which by then should have been plainly visible, when I heard him abruptly give voice to a hoarse cry. At the same instant the low menacing drone of a racing-engine reached me and I clutched at my friend in sheer terror and amazement at the fearsome thing which had suddenly materialized. There, thundering straight at us, intent on our annihilation, was a gigantic car. Despite the gleaming lamps on either side, I distinctly saw its formidable bulk and the glittering metalwork. It seemed the incarnation of speed and destruction, and hunched low over the wheel, just as the girl had described it, was a rigid shape, with white, featureless face. The terror of the apparition was overwhelming; few drivers could have withstood the instinctive desire to swerve out of its path, and, forgetful of all but that hurtling death, Rousseau twisted his wheel to the left in a vain attempt to avoid the collision. I heard the screech of the brakes; then to my horror we slithered and crashed right through the ghastly thing, tearing great lumps from the grassy top of the bank. My brain reeled at the sickening, uncanny experience, for instead of the jarring smash I had expected, the oncoming monster had vanished instantly, "like smoke". Fortunately

my presence of mind returned as we struck the ditch ; at that moment I realized, I believe, in a flash of understanding, how we had been tricked, and leapt clear, propelled from behind, as the car collapsed and turned on its side. Rousseau had rolled several feet away, apparently stunned, and I had the good sense to lie still also and feign unconsciousness. Ten minutes passed perhaps, then came a hoarse murmur of conversation, and through half-closed eyes I saw several furtive shapes creeping through the grass.

"Here they are," a woman's melodious voice exclaimed, followed by a remark I did not catch, in the sibilant utterance of the Chinaman known as Karl Bader, as the light of a flashlamp flickered over my face.

"Both killed—that's good," he murmured ; "we shan't want the wires."

"Better make sure," another voice broke in, and to my horror I recognized Dr. Faubert. "Let them have the current from number two dynamo for ten minutes. Low tension leaves no trace, but stops the heart once and for all," and he purred like a great cat.

Wo Sung grumbled under his breath ; then there came the unpleasant slither and swish of heavy insulated wires being dragged through the wet grass.

"You connect them up, Giselle," the doctor's soft, oily voice commanded, "and when I flash my light, let them have it."

"Do it yourself," the woman retorted. "Or, better still, let Wo Sung do it. I'm sick of being your catspaw. You love to see men squirm and die, but you want none of the risk. And what about the jewellery ? I'm going to have my share this time."

The convulsive beating of my heart almost choked me as a wire was twisted round my ankle. This was too much. Since Bertillon did not come I would fight for my life ; at any moment I might be electrocuted. With a jerk I sat up, pistol in hand, but before I could speak a shrill cry burst from the woman as dazzling magnesium flares abruptly illumined the ghoulis scene, and Bertillon's voice, harsh with emotion, cried :



"Up with your hands, every one! Chain them together, Delvoye. They're a filthy lot; you needn't trouble to be gentle."

I staggered to my feet and gazed about me. A dozen gendarmes had leapt at the wildly struggling men and women, and a few seconds later the welcome click of the handcuffs sounded, and Bertillon, who had given his brandy-flask to Rousseau, came quickly to my side.

"*Bon Dieu*, what happened?" he asked, "Did Rousseau lose his head? I expected you both to be killed the way you came crashing over the bank."

"Then you didn't see the ghost car?" I gasped, and, shaking still at the memory, I quickly related the terrible and apparently supernatural encounter.

"By Jove, that's worthy of our friend Faubert!" Bertillon cried. "Now I understand the meaning of that white hoarding. It serves as a screen for the picture, and the illusion is only visible as you get near that fatal curve. The noise of an engine is produced by a mechanism at the back—we all heard it; but the climax is the idea of placing lights, real lights, which run forward on those mysterious rods just where they fit into the picture. No wonder you could see the outline of the car and its driver despite the lamps. His projecting apparatus moved on a swivel, of course, producing the illusion of an impending collision to anyone approaching, because the picture sweeps at terrific speed across the road; a really novel idea! The horrible part of the scheme, as though that were not enough, is that these beasts make quite sure their victims shall not revive by sending a special electrical current through them which paralyses the heart's action but leaves no trace. That explains why every accident on this haunted road has been fatal. Well, we have the evidence we need at any rate. Let us search the house and have a look at this phantom-car apparatus; then Delvoye can take them to headquarters."

"I wonder why it was the girl escaped alive," I hazarded, "since we know now that after robbing their victims they electrocuted them?"

"I can guess," Rousseau interposed. "Faubert discovered that the girl had been to see us. He thought that her wild tale

of a ghost car would cause us to drop the case. Better put our prisoners in front, monsieur ; remember the dogs."

But these formidable guardians had been locked in an out-house and we were able to enter the farm without trouble. In a garret of which the circular window overlooked the road we discovered the mad doctor's apparatus, an ingenious projector on rails and swivel support. The picture that produced the terrifying illusion was that of a large racing car photographed from a position level with the wheels, and I understood at last why the phantom driver's face had appeared so ghastly ; it had been rendered transparent by means of a chemical.

Mustering our band of murderers, we were about to leave, when Dr. Faubert, who was heavily manacled, turned to Bertillon and said :

"My engines are still running ; they may cause a blaze if unattended. Will you cut off the current, monsieur ? The switchboard is in that room."

For once Bertillon was off his guard. With a curt nod, gripping the prisoner's arm, he walked to a wall covered with complex instruments. As he turned in mute interrogation, Dr. Faubert thrust his hands towards a glass-mounted terminal. At the same instant, with a quick twist, Rousseau jerked our chief back, breaking his hold on the prisoner's arm just as a vicious spark crackled between the steel handcuffs. Bertillon picked himself up with a rueful grin, which changed to a gasp of horror when he caught sight of the livid, twisted face of Dr. Faubert as he hung suspended by the wrists, whilst a continuous stream of miniature lightning spat and drummed on the stone floor.

"Thanks, Rousseau—he nearly took me along. What a fool I've been ! See if you can find the switch. He, at least, has cheated the guillotine. Perhaps some of you would prefer that way also ?" he added savagely, turning towards the remainder of the band, who cowered by the door horrified at their leader's terrible end.

At the trial, however, one and all seized the opportunity, since he was dead, to accuse Dr. Faubert of having compelled them by threats to help him ; but, although they escaped capital

punishment, their callous crimes caused the jury to inflict what was probably a worse fate—the penal settlements at Cayenne for life.

Prince Damiello, an Alsatian whose true name was Frantz Kaufman, was the only one who got off scot free. The evidence against him was too flimsy for the jury, although *we* knew that without a doubt he had invited the many victims to his notorious orgies at the doctor's orders so as to compel them to drive over the Orly highway at night.

**EPISODE XI**  
**THE CLUE OF THE GLITTERING DUST**



## THE CLUE OF THE GLITTERING DUST

WHEN Hans Alexander, Chief of the Berliner Geheimpolizei, was annoyed, the hideous scars which criss-crossed his round, fat face, each the memento of a students' duel, deepened and quivered in queer fashion.

"My face is my best friend," he was wont to say, and, except for the scars, that was true, for never did any man look less like a detective than this corpulent, smiling German, with the red nose and bulging paunch of the beer-drinker. Woe to the malefactor, however, who allowed himself to be deceived by the foolish mask, for behind it lurked a mind as keen, resourceful, and swift to act as that of the Macedonian conqueror from whom, quaintly enough, the big Teuton claimed descent. This boast of ancient lineage was one of those queer kinks with which so many clever men seem to be obsessed, although I wondered at times if Hans Alexander had not added this foible to his stock-in-trade of deceptive poses with subtle intent. The scars were the first thing I noticed one morning when, soon after my arrival in Berlin, I entered his office with a report from the Paris Sûreté. A pulsing flame appeared to vibrate in their depths, although, as usual, his light blue eyes met mine with well-simulated calm.

"Sit down," he yawned, pushing a box of cigars towards me. "These are real Hamburgers ; only got them to-day. Did you enlarge that fingerprint Monsieur Bertillon sent us ?"

During the month I had worked under the great detective we had become very friendly, thus, instead of replying, I stared steadily at the puckered lines as though watching some unusual phenomenon. Herr Alexander understood me at once, and with a rueful laugh he growled :

"Well, yes, they are twitching this morning. A devil of a case has cropped up. I'm absolutely badgered to death by

'phone calls from the French Embassy, and I've not progressed the least bit."

"You are speaking of the Violette Dufour mystery, I suppose? I've read a vague account in the papers. What exactly occurred? Was the girl really murdered?"

"Everything points that way—unless—well, Fräulein Dufour, whose father is a big man in the diplomatic service, had been going the pace lately, and, amongst other things, gambled a lot at the Hansa baccarat tables. A pretty girl, with many admirers, on the night of her death she had won a lot of money, and about two o'clock left the club in the company of several officers of the Blue Guard, to take supper in the Friedrich Café. They then spent an hour or so at Negri's drinking cocktails, and about five in the morning Violette Dufour drove away alone in her big Overland car. What happened after that is not clear. The Nachtwächter, when going his rounds, noticed the car standing outside the Dufour mansion in the Goethe Strasse. The engine was running, the lights were on, the door of the garage wide open, and in the car, one arm flung out, and hanging head down over the running-board, was the girl, dead! I hurried there at once and examined everything. Apart from a slight cut and a bruise above the nose, inflicted I think when she fell against the door, there was not a sign to show how she had died. But all her money and jewels, except a ring and a bracelet, were gone, and a gold vanity set fitted into the dashboard had been wrenched out. Doctor Müller is convinced she was murdered, despite the absence of wounds, and despite the fact that the post-mortem disclosed not a trace of poison. He tells me that the blood-vessels and the lungs were unusually congested, however, and the face blue, as though she had been asphyxiated. It is possible, of course, that as she was about to get in and take the wheel again after opening the garage door the murderer appeared suddenly, twisted a heavy cloth over her mouth and nose, and held her thus until she was dead."

"You say there was a bruise and a gash on her face, caused when she fell," I remarked thoughtfully. "Was there any blood?"

Herr Alexander fidgeted a moment, whilst his telltale scars pulsed more rapidly. "Yes—a little. I see your point. You mean that bruises do not form after death nor do cuts bleed, and that therefore the girl was still alive, although probably dying, when she fell half out of the open car. Which definitely disposes of the theory that she was gripped from behind and stifled whilst standing on the running-board, since then she would either have pitched head first into the car or collapsed on the path the moment the murderer released the lifeless body. Moreover, if suffocation was incomplete, as would appear from the cut and bruise, she should have recovered in time."

"Surely you realize also," I remarked, "that something broke her fall, probably the cushion of the car, otherwise she would have received more serious injuries than just a tiny cut."

Herr Alexander nodded. "There remain then only two alternatives: either the murderer was in the car with the girl—and again the blood is not explained—or else she was not murdered at all but died from heart-failure, and some prowling thief, finding the poor girl helpless, seized the opportunity to rob her. Yet a casual thief would have known nothing of the bundle of banknotes she carried, which were in a pocket of the automobile. Nor would a thief of the usual sneaking type have had the pluck to search the pockets with the dead girl lying on the step."

"If the murderer knew about her winnings and where these were hidden, does that not make it probable the crime was committed by a member of the club from inside the car?"

"But, *mein Gott*, she was with Prinz Ludwig von Stolzheim the whole evening! I tell you, I'm absolutely at my wits' end. I have questioned everyone who approached the girl. There is only one doubtful person among them, a woman named Rosa Varech. She is the sweetheart of a Russian doctor—a political exile. His name is—wait a moment—Sergius Treganowsky. But Rosa Varech left the club long after Violette and the prince. Fräulein Violette's father insists that I get in touch with Monsieur Bertillon, since we appear to be beaten, but that, officially, I cannot do."



"I will telephone to my chief if you like," I said quietly. "Perhaps he may have a suggestion to make."

"I wish you would—give him a full report and let me know what he says. I am ill with anxiety. Personally I should welcome his advice. I would rather swallow my pride than fail, but how can he, far away in Paris, hope to pierce the veil of mystery when we of the Geheime who are on the spot cannot do so?"

"He will probably reason from analogy. The Sûreté has an inexhaustible collection of dossiers, and Bertillon has classified them all on the assumption that there is no such thing as an original crime. He will, however, want to know all about the girl. You know his formulæ: Who profits——"

"Yes, yes. I have gone into all that. We correspond regularly. In this case no one of the girl's entourage is in need of money. There is no lover, although she was an outrageous flirt; and her past life gives us no clue. This is a crime—if it is one—without premeditation as we understand that elastic term."

"Then you can only hope to trace the stolen trinkets if the criminal tries to sell them; or, if he belongs to the underworld, offer a reward that will tempt an informer."

"We have already done so—a large sum. I am going to comb all the haunts of our criminals now. Please let me know as soon as possible what the great Bertillon thinks of the puzzle."

As I left the office I ran into Inspector August Heineman, a small secretive fellow, always dressed in rusty black, whose wizened, sad face and bleary eyes were as odd as his wheezy laugh and constant good humour.

"*Guten morgen*," he croaked in a cracked voice. "How is the chief? I'm afraid to face him, for I've the story of another tragedy to relate. It's definitely a crime this time, and so like the Dufour mystery that it was certainly committed by the same man or gang."

"Good lord," I cried, "another? I'll come back with you—I've been asked to help."

Heineman nodded and knocked timidly on the heavy oaken

door I had just shut behind me. It flew wide with sudden violence, and Herr Alexander, livid, with staring eyes, his stoic's pose completely shattered, gripped his subordinate by the shoulder and dragged him into the room. So moved was the big man that he began to rave and shout, heedless of the passing officials. I quickly followed and put my back against the door, closing it with a snap.

"I've just heard—the prefect telephoned! Baron Vladimir Flostoff has been found at the very gates of his mansion, lying beside his car."

"*Jawohl*," Heineman replied, reproachfully jerking at his coat, which his chief had pulled awry in his agitation. "I'm not to blame, sir, so it's no use getting angry with me. I've a report here . . ."

Herr Alexander wiped his face with a huge handkerchief, took several rapid turns about the room, and, as suddenly calm once more, motioned us to chairs and flipped his inevitable box of cigars across the table.

"Sorry, Heineman—let's have the report. When was this thing discovered?"

"At dawn. We tried to get you, but you were busy on the Dufour case, and I thought it best to keep the papers from getting hold of the story. The body and car were photographed, plain clothes officers guard the street, and nothing has been touched except the body, which we were compelled to carry into the lodgekeeper's room."

Settling himself more comfortably, the little detective dragged a bulky notebook from a pocket and began to read.

"At six, Peter Strauss, the lodgekeeper, was surprised to see a bright light shining through his window. Jumping out of bed, he pulled a curtain aside and saw it proceeded from a car standing outside the gates. Since the engine was running, he concluded his master had forgotten his keys; he often lets himself in when not alone," and Heineman coughed significantly. "Strauss ran out and found the Baron lying face downwards beside the automobile, one hand clutching the key of the gates. As soon as he realized the man was beyond help he had the good sense to telephone at once to the Polizeiwache, which

brought me on the scene. There were no marks except those of the lodgekeeper's bare feet near the body, although the ground was soft and *his* footprints clearly defined. There were, however, signs that someone had stood quite a long time in the shadow of some laurel bushes near the wall, about five yards to the right. A very tall man, I should say, wearing fairly big shoes. Must have rolled and smoked numerous cigarettes, although he took care not to throw the stubs on the ground, because I found several cigarette-papers in the garden which had blown away unnoticed. This unknown watcher had peered through the bushes very often, tearing away some of the leaves, and that's how I know he was tall. There is a very faint depression where he stood, so faint that it is obvious he placed something, a rug perhaps, on the ground so as to avoid leaving footprints. This rug or cloak he must afterwards have spread in front of him when he approached the car, because, despite his caution, the edge of his shoes pressed into the soft earth when he lifted it from under his feet. A cunning fellow evidently. There is no wound on the Baron, nothing to show how he died, but his pocket book, watch, and jewellery have been taken. I examined the body with my lenses, however, and found this." Heineman drew an envelope from his pocket and, pulling a sheet of notepaper from a rack, shook out a pinch of queer glittering dust.

"What is it !" Alexander asked breathlessly.

"Thin blown glass ; looks like the particles you get when you smash an electric bulb. In fact I have an idea that either the Baron or his murderer broke his electric torch——"

"Nonsense," the chief of police exclaimed, "the bulb of a torch is so small you would never see the fragments if it burst. This has nothing to do with the Baron's death. Where did you say you found it ?"

"I didn't say," Heineman grunted. "As a matter of fact, Von Flostoff was wearing an overcoat with a fur collar, and this dust was in the fur."

The strangeness of the detective's remark startled me.

"On his collar," I exclaimed. "That certainly seems to point to a blow having been struck with an electric torch."

"But there is no wound on the man—nothing—not a mark ! Only the bridge of the nose and the forehead were scratched and bled a little when he fell face down in the gravel."

Herr Alexander rubbed his scalp and groaned.

"What is one to make of such a case ? Well, I'll go and have a look at the Baron and examine the car for fingerprints, although a man who takes such care not to leave footprints would naturally wear gloves. You'd better investigate the Baron's past, Heineman. Let me have a detailed report of his movements last night. Find out who was with him during the evening. Get a list of his friends and his servants, and of the women who have played a part in his life."

"If you don't mind," I remarked, struck by a sudden thought, "I should like to examine these particles of glass under a microscope."

"Certainly," the detective said, staring curiously. "What do you expect to find ?"

"I cannot say—but I have a feeling this stuff may give us a starting-point. I'll take some to your analyst also. Then I'll 'phone Bertillon and let you know the result."

I had founded great hopes on the result of my microscopic examination of the queer dust, but I was doomed to disappointment. Beyond a faint greenish tinge there was nothing about the thin, slightly curved fragments that could help us. Without a doubt they had once formed part of an electric bulb which had been broken. The very minute traces of arsenic revealed by the analysis were consistent with the green tint, since arsenic is the basis of many green dyes. It was late before I was able to put a call through to Monsieur Bertillon.

"I have already had an account of the strange death of Violette Dufour from the father," he said. "I had come to the conclusion that the girl died of heart-failure, brought on probably by the somewhat unhealthy and exhausting life she led, but this second death alters matters considerably. I am anxious to know more. Apparently a totally new method for killing people swiftly and noiselessly has been invented. So far Alexander has advanced the only rational explanation—suffocation by means of a thick cloth twisted about the victim's

nose and mouth." And yet it doesn't fit in with the bruises and abrasions. Life could not have been extinct when these victims collapsed, or the abrasions would not have bled, but if some spark of life remained they should have recovered, at least partially. I don't think the glass dust has anything to do with the Baron's death. If you can discover where he spent the night you'll probably find that an electric bulb burst and sprinkled his coat. Such particles would naturally cling to fur. If the police wish me to come to Berlin I shall be glad to help; the case interests me."

The next day the papers were full of fantastic accounts of the tragedy, for, despite every precaution, the news had leaked out. Many and varied were the theories advanced by arm-chair experts, and the police were severely criticized. Every known receiver was watched and a list of the stolen jewellery circulated. The rewards, too, were gradually increased, until an informer would have netted a fortune, yet no one came forward, and as the days passed without news it became manifest that the murderer, whoever he was, had worked alone and was not a denizen of the underworld of crime. A systematic and patient investigation of the habits of the men and women who frequented the pleasure resorts the Baron had visited during the days preceding his death brought to light the significant detail, however, that his secretary, a handsome young Roumanian named Ranesco, was a member of a secret society of Russian nihilists. It was known to the police that many of the political exiles in Berlin, Russians for the most part, had dealings with this sinister association, and that Rosa Varech, the woman who had sat opposite Violette Dufour at the Hansa baccarat rooms, and had therefore seen her win a small fortune, was the sweetheart of Dr. Treganowski, suspected of being the leader of the nihilists. Moreover, Rosa Varech and Ranesco had been seen chatting in the lounge of the Hansa club a few minutes before Baron Flostoff, who had also been exceptionally lucky at cards, had declared he would drive home alone. Herr Alexander thereupon ordered Heineman to bring the secretary to his office in order to question him, and I at once arranged to be present at the interview.

I was in fact discussing the various aspects of the case with the chief of police, when Heineman slipped silently into the room. His usually pale face was flushed, and his laboured breath betrayed something of the inward excitement which he strove in vain to suppress.

"Gone—vanished!" he wheezed. "Ranesco has vanished! He remained in the baccarat room after his employer left, but hardly had the cards been dealt again when he suddenly rushed out, hatless and without his overcoat. The doorkeeper saw him hail a taxi, shout something to the driver, and leap into the cab, which started before the door had been closed."

"A taxi—that's good—we should easily find the chauffeur!" Alexander cried eagerly.

"I've found him—naturally," Heineman remarked as though offended. "That was my first step. Listen now to the man's statement: 'A young fellow ran out of the Hansa about three in the morning, and shouted, "A hundred marks if you catch up with that red car just turning the corner!" He jumped in, and I gave the engine all the gas she would take. I had noticed a woman sitting in the car he wanted me to overtake as I was turning to drive back to the Friedrich Strasse, and I thought it was a love affair. Not a bit of it: as soon as the automobile was in sight again my fare opened the window and cried, "Go slow; I want to follow without being spotted. If they stop, pass them quickly and then pull up." I saw then that there were actually three of us, for the woman was after another car in front. Well, we had a long drive to the Thiergarten. I wasn't properly watching anything except the road, but I expect the man inside had his eyes on the girl, for just as the red coupé swerved and started off at full speed for the town again, out he tumbles, terribly excited, crying, "Did you see that trick? She gave us the slip when her driver passed behind the trees." Before I could answer he pushed a bank-note into my hand and was running as hard as he could pelt through the bushes. When I made sure it was really a hundred marks he'd given me I settled down to wait in case he came back.'"

"That's his statement, Chief, and the young man's description

tallies with that of Ranesco. The driver couldn't tell me what the woman was like, but he said the car which she had appeared to be following was a dark blue Daimler, and he got part of the number—71C. So I'm pretty sure it was Baron Flostoff these two were after. His car is a Daimler, and its number is 5771C. From that moment no one has set eyes on Ranesco. His rooms are shut, and he has not been home."

I stared in astonishment at the efficient little man.

"Quick work, Heineman," Alexander said, offering him a cigar, a sure sign he was pleased. "You've set men to watch the fellow's flat, of course? Excellent!"

"There's more to come," the detective interrupted, turning the pages of his notebook. "I've discovered that Ranesco was at the Hansa club the night Fräulein Dufour was killed. He left when she did, and followed her from tavern to tavern. I managed to get a photograph of the Roumanian by calling on all the photographers who specialize in passport portraits, and I showed the picture to the waiters at the places where Violette Dufour and the prince had been. Several of them remembered Ranesco and said they noticed that he had appeared strangely excited. Also that he had watched the girl intently, rising to go when she and the prince left, as though jealous."

"*Himmel Gottes!*" Herr Alexander cried. "You imagine Ranesco is the mysterious murderer?"

"I should feel sure of it if he hadn't vanished. But why, after committing those crimes so cleverly, should he make such a blunder. Still, he may suddenly have lost his nerve."

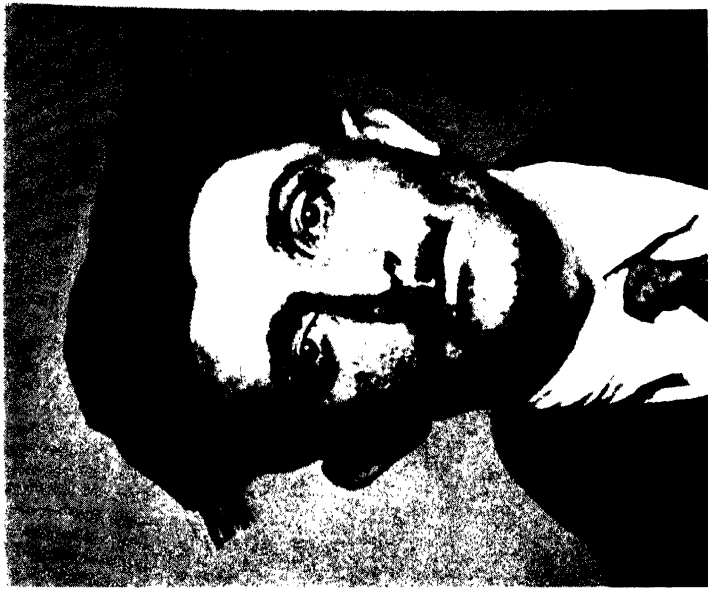
The chief of police looked meaningly at me. "Will you explain all this when you telephone to Monsieur Bertillon to-day?"

For a moment I hesitated, then, making the plunge, I said: "Why not ask him to come to Berlin—unofficially, of course? He is most eager to help; he says the case is without parallel. If I wire at once he can arrive to-morrow. I know he will be delighted to study your clever methods. We have no one at the Sûreté who could have accomplished what you have done."

This little bit of tactful flattery put both men in good humour,



RANESCO, THE ROUMANIAN, AS HE APPEARED BEFORE THE TRAGIC EVENTS THAT COST HIM HIS LIFE



RANESCO AT THE TIME OF HIS DESPERATE ATTEMPT TO AVENGE HIS FRIEND. THE CHANGE IN HIS APPEARANCE IS STARTLING AND PATHETIC





and the battle was won. When, the following afternoon, Heineman came to headquarters, Bertillon was already conferring with the chief of police despite the fatigue of the long journey. After a few well chosen compliments he settled himself to listen attentively to the little detective's report.

"I've got on the track of Ranesco," Heineman began excitedly in that cracked, whistling voice which fitted his queer personality. "He is still in Berlin, and hanging about Dr. Treganowsky's house. Oddly enough, rumour has it he is in love with the woman Rosa Varech, so I thought it likely I should find him there. He was dressed as a labourer, and wore a black beard, but I spotted him by his dainty way of smoking cigarettes. Unfortunately he saw me and was off like a flash. It won't be long before we clap the bracelets on him, though."

Bertillon remained for many minutes lost in thought.

"This Treganowsky, now," he said at last, "who and what is he?"

"I've looked up his past," Herr Alexander replied. "He was at the head of a very prosperous nursing-home in Moscow some years ago, but had to flee because of his political activities. Moreover, it seems several patients died most mysteriously. The fellow thereupon came to Berlin and set up in practice, but for a long time he almost starved. He managed, however, to join several good clubs, and the tide began to turn, although I believe he is still quite poor. He is engaged to a very beautiful woman named Rosa Varech, also a Russian, and I have heard she has money, although we know little about her beyond the fact that her husband died two years ago, soon after Treganowsky arrived in Berlin, and left her a small annuity. Whilst not really gentlefolks, there is nothing against either the man or the woman."

Bertillon nodded. "I made enquiries before coming and discovered that Ranesco was in love with Violette Dufour. Did you not know that?"

Heineman looked startled and made as if to answer, but his chief broke in quickly. "No, no, not the French girl. Ranesco is infatuated with Rosa Varech."

"How did he stand with his employer, the Baron?" Bertillon asked, purposely ignoring the contradiction.

"I believe Flostoff thought well of his secretary, whose life he saved once when the young fellow was attacked by footpads," Alexander replied.

"Quite so. Well, unless I am much mistaken, Ranesco suspects who killed the Baron, and is after him. He was, as a matter of fact, secretly engaged to Violette Dufour. That's news to you, eh? Well, it's true. A man of violent passions, he was devoted to the girl and very fond of his employer, and is determined to avenge them both. Find Ranesco and you'll be near the end of your quest."

Heineman, who had been listening intently, suddenly slapped his thigh. "*Donnerwetter*—I'll bet you are right, mein Herr. That's why he followed—would it be Rosa? Is she implicated in this business?"

"I cannot say—looks like it, since you say he's still hanging round the place where she lives. By the way, does she actually reside with Treganowsky?"

"No, but their rooms are in the same house."

"Well, find Ranesco. I'm at the Kaiserhof. I'll be waiting to hear from you," and Bertillon rose, shook hands, and withdrew, giving a slight tug at my sleeve as he did so. Half an hour later I rejoined him at the hotel, and found him sitting by the window, thoughtfully staring into the street.

"Is Treganowsky a squat, corpulent fellow with flat Mongolian features?" he asked without preamble.

I strode to the window and peered cautiously at the hurrying throng below.

"You mean I've been followed?" I asked.

"Undoubtedly. Do you see that cab? It's just drawing up against the opposite pavement."

"But it's empty. Do you mean the cabman . . .?"

"Of course—I noticed him outside the Polizei Presidium when I arrived."

Without a word I seized the telephone and called Herr Alexander. The description he gave me of Treganowsky was that of the driver Bertillon had pointed out, who appeared

to have settled himself for a long wait. I looked at my chief in mute interrogation and he nodded thoughtfully.

"I'm thinking our young Roumanian may be in great danger. Evidently this Russian doctor, who is supposed to be at the head of a dangerous secret society, is mixed up with these murders, if he is not indeed the actual criminal. The secret society may be a blind. He is obviously anxious to know what the police are doing. I wonder how he discovered that I have come to Berlin? Hullo, he is off—in a hurry too."

A moment later a page came to announce a visitor, and on his heels followed Heineman, who, with his ill-fitting black clothes and furtive manner, gave the impression of having come to serve a writ, and I saw the page glance sympathetically at us and then at the shabby bag the detective carried.

"I'm going to spend the night at Moabit," Heineman said when the lad had gone. "We must get hold of Ranesco somehow. If he doesn't show up at Rosa's house again we may find him in one of the taverns of the Moabit quarter. He was followed there by one of my men, but gave him the slip, an easy matter in that unsavoury neighbourhood."

"You'll do nothing if you go dressed as you are," I replied. "Your appearance here has already frightened a spy." And I related the episode of the cab driver. Heineman tapped his black bag and nodded.

"An accomplice, no doubt. But it cannot possibly be the Russian doctor. I've two men watching him, and they would have telephoned that he was trailing me. It is just a chance resemblance."

Bertillon looked at me and smiled. "Better alter your appearance," he suggested. "Whilst Herr Heineman, who must remain as he is, acts as decoy, you can then shadow whoever follows *him* when he leaves."

"Yes, a good idea," the little man agreed. "I had meant to change here, but I'll return to headquarters instead and dress as an old beggar woman. It's a part I often play."

So it was settled, and when Heineman left the hotel I followed at a distance in the guise of a merchant seaman, and had the satisfaction of seeing the erstwhile cabman, also

subtly transformed, slouching along behind. Dusk was not far away when Heineman emerged from one of the buildings adjoining the police headquarters, admirably disguised as an old mendicant, and the mysterious spy, who had posted himself in a doorway, apparently paid no attention to either of us.

Moabit is a dreary, dirty suburb, where prisons, barracks, and infamous taverns jostle each other pell-mell, and it seemed to me when I entered the Heringsgasse, which was our destination, that it could have no counterpart in any of the world's great cities. It was in that foul runway Ranesco, dressed in grimy overalls, had last been seen, and, according to the detective who had followed him, he was still there. In a low archway facing Kampf's cellar tavern, the worst den in the place, Heineman stripped off his bonnet, shawl, and skirt and swiftly stuffed these feminine attributes into an empty barrel. A few deft touches to his face with the help of the tiny make-up case I always carried thereupon transformed him into a typical *Verbrecher*.\*

"I think we'd better go through the *Kaschemmen* (thieves' dens) first, and if he's not there we'll try all the lodging-houses," he suggested. Except for the guttural German language they spoke, the men and women thronging the evil haunts differed little from those to be found at La Villette or Aubervilliers in Paris. A life of crime seems to breed a type common to every land. My knowledge of their complex slang stood me in good stead, and no one paid the slightest attention to us. At the end of two weary hours it became evident, however, despite the detective's report, that our quarry was not to be caught so easily.

The neighbourhood, to a casual observer, seemed to be almost deserted, although now and then some evil, leering creature would peep from a doorway as we passed and beckon, until at last, with midnight striking at the Moabit prison, I turned to Heineman with a stifled yawn.

"We are wasting our time, I think. Until your men have located the fellow, if he really came here, we should be better employed watching Treganowsky and Rosa."

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\* Criminal.

My companion grunted impatiently. "You say that because your clever chief believes the Russian to be an accomplice of the murderer. I feel sure he is wrong. We've questioned the concierge at his house and also the neighbours. Treganowsky rarely stirs out at night, and at the time those two murders were committed he was at home."

Suddenly he gripped my arm and gave vent to a low, plaintive whistle, whereupon a girl of the usual apache type, who had turned the corner whilst Heineman was speaking, came sauntering up to us. Pulling some cigarettes from his pocket, my friend lit one and offered the packet to the girl, asking softly as he struck a match, "Anything wrong, Charlotte?"

"Hans sent me. Better come at once. Raneco has been seen: he is watching the front entrance of the Hansa club whilst pretending to sell newspapers."

Taking my arm, Heineman dragged me after him, almost running in his eagerness, but as several men and women came out, suspicious of our behaviour, he said loudly enough for all to hear, "What's that? The police are coming? We'd better make ourselves scarce."

Once past the corner he dropped all pretence and ran swiftly to the car his agent had brought. In the Mittel Strasse, near the famous Hansa Club, a thick-set fellow with bristling moustache sprang to the empty seat beside the driver without waiting for him to pull up.

"Something queer is in the wind," he said quickly. "Horst, of the Berliner Bank, came out of the club five minutes ago and hailed a taxi. A passing car snapped him up before the fellow to whom he had beckoned could turn, and the usual row started. I was watching Raneco closely at the time; the episode seemed to fascinate him; and when Horst settled the matter by throwing a coin to the disappointed chauffeur and getting into the cab which had come first, Raneco suddenly dropped the papers he'd been selling into a doorway and ran after the taxi as hard as he could go. I at once ordered Fritz to follow, so as to wait for you. They vanished in the direction of the Potsdammer Platz, and if we hurry we'll yet overtake them."

But the famous square, when we reached it, was silent and deserted, nor was there any sign of our quarry in the adjoining streets.

"Drive to Baron Flostoff's town house," Heineman cried. "Ranescio resided there whilst his secretary, and he still has the keys. He may have gone there; if so, I'll arrest him, proof or no proof. I dare not wait and give him the opportunity of committing yet another murder. By Jove, we're in luck; there is actually a light in one of the windows although all the servants left some days ago."

He hastily clambered out and ran up the path. The door was shut, and precious minutes were lost before the driver found one of the nightwatchmen, who in Germany usually carry a key to open the doors of every house on their beat. Flashing my lamp about the hall, I stumbled up the stairs behind the detective, who, despite his short legs, was as active as a cat. As I reached the first landing a horrible cry caused me to clear the intervening steps at a run, and I saw that he was bending over the body of a man who sprawled across the threshold of an apartment on the right. One glance at the livid, pain-racked face told me he was dead.

"It is Ranescio," Heineman whispered; "dead; in the same mysterious fashion as those others. And look," he added shrilly, "there is some glittering dust on his clothes similar to that which I picked from the Baron's collar. *Gott*, what does it mean?"

"It means that Bertillon was right," I said, dropping to one knee beside the dead man. "Ranescio followed the real murderer and paid for his daring with his life. Let us examine his rooms; there is a queer smell of charred paper in the air."

This odour was strongest in what had obviously been the Roumanian's study, and a heap of grey, flaky ashes in the grate showed whence it had come.

"I'll wager Ranescio wrote an account of what he discovered and the criminal burnt it," I exclaimed. "That's why the poor devil was killed

A rapid but thorough search disclosed nothing else, but as



TREGANOWSKY, THE RUSSIAN MURDERER

# PREFECTURE DE POLICE


SECRETARIAT POLICE

## Bulletin de Demande

Par *A. A.*

*M HANS ALEXANDER, LEXINGTON*

Adresse: *Police.*

| DESIGNATION DES DOCUMENTS                                      | COTES | OBSERVATIONS  |
|--|-------|---|
| <i>AMPOULE A LUXE<br/>GAS DE BRAS BRAS / CASE<br/>- TREGAN</i> |       |  |

THE POISON BULB TAKEN AWAY BY BERTILLON AND PHOTOGRAPHED IN SPECIAL LIGHT TO SHOW THE GAS AS A LUMINOUS VAPOUR IN THE BULB





we turned to go I noticed a squat machine in a corner which looked strangely familiar.

"A dictaphone," I cried with swift inspiration. "Oh, if only he thought of that!"

A cylinder was on the reel, and, quickly adjusting the ear-piece, I started the motor. A small nasal voice began to dictate what sounded like a reply to an invitation for the unfortunate Baron Flostoff. Bitterly disappointed, I handed the second ear-tube to Heineman.

"I am afraid it's hopeless," I said, "but there are five or six other cylinders."

"All blanks," my friend growled. "I've looked at them. Wait a bit, though, this cylinder contains a lot more—ah, I was right—listen." As he spoke, the thin, reedy voice abruptly changed, became firm and sonorous, and as I grasped the import of the message that now reached us I hardly dared to breathe.

"In case I die and my written report is destroyed, you who listen, learn that Violette Dufour was killed by poison gas. So was my friend and benefactor Baron Flostoff. I swore to avenge them both. Treganowsky is the fiend who did it, and Rosa Varech helped him. I only discovered definitely how it was done to-night, when I followed and saw, too late to prevent it, the murder of Karl Horst, the banker. You'll find him lying in his garden."

I looked with horror at Heineman, who was rapidly scribbling in his notebook.

"He uses thin glass bulbs," the sonorous voice continued, "filled with a gas that instantly kills. These he throws into the face of his victim so that the gas enters the lungs when they burst. He intended to rob Horst, of course, but had no time, because I rushed at him. He flung a poison bulb at me also, but missed. I heard it smash as I dodged, but before I could grapple with Treganowsky he was gone. I'd forgotten all about the taxi he always keeps handy. I've come here first to leave a record of the whole damnable business in case he should after all outwit me. I am determined, if God gives me strength, this night to force my way into his secret haunt in the

Heringsgasse at Moabit, and to kill him. I'll not trust the police. I swear this is true. I am Sergius Ranesco."

The voice ceased, and I dropped the rubber tube.

"We can guess what happened," Heineman said slowly. "The Russian followed the poor devil and waited behind the door until he came out, whereupon he threw one of his infernal bombs and killed him. He probably realized the Roumanian had recognized him, so he searched the flat, found his statement, and burnt it, convinced there was nothing else. Fortunately he never thought of this machine. You'd better drive to Horst's house, get an ambulance, and take the body away. Meanwhile I'll 'phone headquarters. We'll raid this Russian monster's haunt at dawn. There is no time to lose. To make sure he doesn't get away, all frontiers and ports shall be warned and police will form a cordon around the Heringsgasse."

Whilst Heineman dashed away to see to the various details I hurriedly sent the night porter at the Kaiserhof to waken Bertillon. I knew he would wish to learn of the impending raid, and of this strange and horrible invention which enabled the Russian to kill victim after victim, leaving no trace except a pinch of impalpable glittering dust.

Ten minutes later Bertillon joined me in the silent hall and we hurried to headquarters. Here all was activity. Already every available detective had been sent to Moabit; mounted police and motor-cyclists were coming in from various stations; and within an hour we were speeding towards the gloomy suburb. Evidently the methods employed by the German police for compelling the formidable criminals of Moabit to reveal the Russian's secret lair were efficient, for when we arrived the little detective met us with a grim smile and said:

"Treganowsky is hiding in a cellar under the Kampf tavern. It's there he makes his poison bulbs. I've caught the woman Rosa Varech. Just in time too: she had sent a boy with a note to Kampf, warning him to keep silent. He never got it, for one of our men saw the lad slip it through a window. After that it was an easy matter to worm the truth from the inn-keeper. Evidently Rosa has been watching us for many days. She is a devil, and meant to shoot the first man who came in.

There she is, safely bound and gagged." I looked to where he pointed and saw a handsome, swarthy woman in the grip of several police.

"I'll question her later," Alexander said. "Take her away now. Where is Kampf?"

"Under guard in a back room."

"Good, then let us force our way into the cellar at once," Alexander exclaimed. "These mysterious murders are terrorizing the town, and it's time we gave the Russian a taste of our quality. I don't want any of my men killed, however, so each must carry a small shield in case that devil tries to use his poison bombs. I fancy the things are only dangerous if they burst near the face. The quantity of gas they contain is naturally limited. By the way, Monsieur Bertillon, have you any idea what this gas may be?"

"Some preparation of hydrogen arsenide, I imagine. A whiff of it would be instantly fatal. But if, as you suggest, you hold shields in front of you and tie scarves over mouth and nose also, you should be able to rush him before he can do anything."

"Then we'll raid the crazy Cossack's underground retreat at once. He has probably a stock of these things, and will use them. We must risk that however," Heineman said grimly.

The German police chief nodded.

"Good man; get what you want, Heineman. But we'll wait till the light is stronger. The fellow can't get away. Try your luck with Kampf first, since he is still inside, under guard."

It was obvious when Heineman came out that he had been successful.

"Scared to death of the Russian, and no wonder," he said, laughing. "He begged me to lock him in a cell until we have his dangerous tenant safely under lock and key. The entrance to the cellar is beneath some barrels. Kampf swears Treganowsky cannot get away."

I followed the police into the foul, ill-lit tavern, which in the drizzly mist of dawn looked strangely unreal. In a short time all was ready, and Heineman, accompanied by three burly

detectives, prepared to descend into the cellar, where the Russian was doubtless crouching like some wild beast in its lair, for by now he would know that the end was near. Suddenly my heart contracted as a long grating screech sounded from a corner where the police were pushing aside several heavy casks. With a sudden jerk the foremost quickly wrenched back a sliding door and dropped out of sight. The others at once did likewise. There ensued a moment of tense silence, and then, as I peered down the opening, came a wild yell, the splintering of wood and a crashing of heavy bodies, followed by the spiteful spang of a pistol.

Instantly the orderly attack became a nightmare.

I heard a shrill scream and saw Heineman stagger into the circle of light from my torch, clawing frenziedly at the muffler over his face and uttering short, inhuman howls the while, like a hurt dog. Yelling to the men behind me to hold my legs, I threw myself flat on the edge, seized the tortured man under the armpits, and was dragged back, gripping him with all my strength until we both sprawled on the floor above.

Even during the few seconds I had hung head down over the hole I had been overcome by a terrible nausea ; the walls spun round in a mad, fantastic dance, became a blinding wheel of light that burst abruptly with a roar like a storm at sea ; and then, as in a dream, I found myself in the open street, felt the bite of icy water, and perceived Bertillon bending over me.

"A near thing, my friend," he said, seeing my eyes open. "Poor Heineman is dead ! God knows what's happened to the others. Here, take a nip of this. We are waiting for the fire brigade to bring oxygen masks. That devil evidently fired a bullet into a container full of his poisonous mixture. The place is a death-trap."

With an effort I raised myself slowly to a sitting posture. My skin tingled from the alcohol with which my friends had rubbed me, and, glancing at my hands, I saw that the veins and fingertips were blue and swollen. Fortunately the dizziness was wearing off, although all the chimes in Christendom were still ringing in my head.

Five minutes later, with clanging bell and furious clatter, the emergency squad from the Moabit fire station slid to a halt before the door of Kampf's tavern, and, despite my chief's remonstrances, I donned one of the goggle-eyed asbestos masks and helmets and clambered after Herr Alexander, who was already similarly protected. On the threshold of a room littered with bottles, retorts, and chemicals lay the three unfortunate detectives, their clothes glittering with the familiar powdered glass, of which fragments crunched beneath our feet as we advanced. A huge metal and glass cupola lay shattered on the floor, and sprawling beside it in an ungainly heap, his flat Mongolian face ghastly and contorted, was Treganowski. One hand still gripped the pistol with which he had fired at his reservoir of poison, thereby killing himself and those who had come to take him.

In a corner of his den, shining weirdly in the rays of a sizzling arc-lamp, I saw a heap of glass bulbs ready for use: whilst clamped in a mechanic's vice was a queer cylindrical apparatus, something like an air pump, at which the Russian had evidently been working. When the place had been cleared of its deadly fumes and we could examine everything in detail, we found this to be a spring gun, fitted at one end with a chamber to hold the poison bulbs, which could thus be propelled with great velocity to a distance of many yards.

"His latest invention, no doubt," Bertillon said, handling the weapon gingerly. "It would have enabled the fellow to shoot those vile things at his victims one after the other in quick succession, without even showing himself. Thank heaven criminals capable of conceiving such methods are rare. We must prevent the newspapers from getting hold of the story. We don't want imitators. With your permission, Herr Alexander, I'll take a couple of these things back to Paris. Who knows but what we may also have to contend with something similar one day."

It was thus finally established what the gas was the Russian had used. Let me say merely that each bulb contained nearly half a cubic foot of compressed poison, enough, even if it

burst within a yard of an intended victim, to cause instant death.

We recovered most of the stolen jewellery and money, and Rosa Varech was sent to prison for life, for it was definitely proven that she had been Treganowsky's accomplice.

THE END

PREFECTURE DE POLICE

Secrétaire Général

ARCHIVES



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2 JULES LEBEL, ALIAS "THE GHOUL"

3 JULES LEBEL'S EFFEMINATE EAR

*Frontispiece (see p. 119)*





